



**THE IMPACT OF
GLOBAL ACTORS
(EU, NATO, UN, US, RUSSIA)
ON 2020 POLITICAL
CRISIS IN BELARUS**

By Siarhei Kharytonau
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Policy paper

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1. ABSTRACT / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

100 days after the presidential elections of August 9, 2020, Belarus remains within the hardest and most complex political crisis in its history since the Second World War.

The crisis in Belarus started as a politically driven social movement for a change. After the state security, police, and the army used brutal violence and torture against random civilians and peaceful protesters on August 9-13, a purely political crisis has turned into a multidimensional conflict that now poses



humanitarian, economic, military, and nuclear security risks for the wider Eastern European region (including immediate threat to at least three NATO member states – Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia) and Eastern Partnership neighborhood, and may well grow into an armed civil conflict.

The regime of Alexander Lukashenka has taken no steps to meet any of the demands of its opponents who represent the majority of the population of Belarus, and request, inter alia, an unconditional and immediate resignation of Lukashenka from the presidential seat. On the contrary, repressions gain momentum in response to growing civil solidarity and determination to tear down the lukashism as a system of governance. If the regime of Alexander Lukashenka will continue to gradually amplify the scale and brutality of political repressions against the civilians, the radicalization of protests will be an inevitable next stage of this confrontation.

The situation in Belarus is alarming and it requires immediate synchronized action of all democratic countries to remove Alexander Lukashenka from power and thus avoid a full-fledged civil conflict in a European country the size of Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, and Austria combined. Despite dramatic efforts of the Belarusian people to weaken the regime from by peaceful means from inside the country, the change, too, requires external pressure from the collective West. Foreign governments and international institutions should take the lead in prosecution of those responsible for crimes conducted against the civilians and to close all revenue channels to a self-declared president and his immediate circle.

With poor response to COVID-19, the regime of Alexander Lukashenka failed to keep the main promises of an unwritten “social contract” with the electorate. An informal agreement between Lukashenka and the people existed since mid-1990s. He remained an [almost] uncontested permanent ruler in exchange to basic social security, cheap medical services, certain level of personal safety for those who didn’t engage in politics, and a conservation of “stable” Soviet way of life, social hierarchy and paternalism. The latter reminded the older generation of Brezhnev’s Era of Stagnation and was more and more criticized as the younger generation conquered its living space.

In this policy paper, we aim to give an overview of the first 100 days of protests, the impact of protests on Belarusian society and the state, will provide policy options and scenarios based on position of the political crisis in Belarus as of late November 2020. We tackle the question of influence of global actors (Russia, the EU, NATO, the US) and their role in resolving the political dimension of current

crisis in Belarus (although the crisis has become multidimensional and will require a more complex resolution if it will remain).

Finally, this paper provides policy recommendations for Lithuania, the EU / NATO member states, and NATO alliance as a whole on how to address the challenges of Belarus crisis considering local context and numerous peculiarities of its internal politics and senses.

2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Since the afternoon of August 9, 2020, the population of the Republic of Belarus is experiencing the greatest political crisis in its history since the Second World War.

The situation in Belarus continues to unfold in a very dynamic way, especially now since the Western countries took a lot more proactive approach to Belarus, and Russia seems to question the future of Lukashenka who became an ultimately toxic ally.

The protests that started as peaceful marches, solidarity chains, and sporadic strikes are now expanding to include underground sabotage practices, national economic boycott of businesses related to the regime, and call for foreign sanctions against businesses and companies related to Lukashenka's clan in Belarus and Russia in an effort to make "friendship" with Lukashenka too expensive for any businessman.

A nationwide pro-democratic social movement that was born on the edge of spring-summer 2020 does not appeal to geopolitical or civilizational choice of Belarusians. Instead, it rather focuses on post-election crisis as a purely internal political issue with a single goal that will immediately fix all other issues the agenda: Lukashenka's resignation.

The leaders of protests claim geopolitically neutral future of Belarus as stated in the present Constitution. They prefer to not discuss the geopolitical future of Belarus to keep hesitant audiences that may be less willing to support politicians with clearly anti-Russian rhetoric. Although there are no Russian flags or flags of EU banners in the protests, the national white-red-white flag by itself is clearly perceived as a symbol of humanistic and democratic values and a reference to Belarusian future as a part of European cultural and historical space. The protests are liberal and pro-democratic by nature, although they never target foreign

countries as an issue high in the agenda. It seems like everyone to attend protest rallies is focused on internal issues only: removing the dictator, ending police violence, releasing police prisoners, bringing the perpetrators of crimes against the protesters to justice, and – last, but not least – organizing new fair elections.

The presidential elections campaign that was started in late spring 2020 seemed to be an easy win for Aliaksandr Lukashenka who ruled the country in an authoritarian format for 26 consecutive years. A fully controlled Central elections committee minimized the chances of success to all competitors by tightening the time for preparations to the collect signatures. However, deliberate mismanagement and ignoring of COVID19 pandemic by Lukashenka, unsatisfied – but popular – public demand for a change, and gradually worsening economic situation threw Lukashenka's plan to get another "elegant" victory under a bus.

The first deaths from the coronavirus and Lukashenka's ironic comments on the matter led to growth of public dissatisfaction with his (mis)management of the country overall. This is when the boom of volunteering COVID-19 response movement, ByCOVID, was born. The success of civil campaign to respond to the pandemic resulted into a nationwide self-organized political resistance movement. The desire for political change and frustration about incompetent response of the authorities to COVID-19 pandemic heated up public interest to national politics – which remained a very niche field of interest across the country for almost a decade.

Then, three alternative leaders who previously were never really engaged in opposition-led political activity, or political activity whatsoever, popped up into the public, and claimed their plans to run for the presidency:

- A philanthropist and a CEO of Gazprom-owned commercial bank, Viktar Babaryka.
- An entrepreneur and vlogger, Siarhei Tsikhanouski.
- And a former diplomat and bureaucrat, Valery Tsapkala.¹

Soon after their popularity started getting visibly out of control in the first few weeks after their announcements to run for the presidency, Lukashenka used his classical tactics against all three alternative candidates. Babaryka and Tsikhanouski were thrown into a jail with no reasonable grounding. Tsapkala was pushed out of Belarus.

And then an unexpected move happened: the wife of Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Sviatlana, decided to run in the election instead of her husband who was arrested in late May following a police provocation. Soon after that, three women who led the offices of alternative candidates announced the creation of a joint opposition team to promote Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.

Tsikhanouskaya is a former English language teacher who remained a housewife for a long time. Shy by nature, and very hesitant to enter the public (not talking about the political) life, she proved being a very fast – and brave – learner. Tsikhanouskaya gained unbelievable popularity across Belarus over a matter of weeks and managed to gather the largest (by late July) peaceful political rallies in the political history of Belarus with dozens of thousands of attendants.

In April 2020, the official level of trust [1] to Lukashenka in Minsk made up only around 24%. The meetings to sign in support of alternative candidates were so popular [2] among the Belarusians, that many more joined the political life with great passion. The politics

have finally become a fashionable topic to discuss.

Since 1999 each and every election campaign in Belarus has been falsified after the state was transformed into a personal fiefdom of Lukashenka who controlled every pillar of state power in Belarus with extensive state security force. Traditionally, in early voting weeks, the elections commission will do most of falsification. During 2020 election, the Central elections committee announced an unbelievable 41.7% of voters attended [3] early voting.

After many years of political pessimism, the opponents of Lukashenka decided to win within purely legal form of competition, by following each and every rule and urging all those who never voted to go to their polling stations and break the falsifications by participating in classical “stunning elections” format. It worked. On a day of August 9, millions of people joined the lines in front of polling station to vote – not for Tsikhanouskaya, but against Lukashenka. Often, for the first time in the last two decades.

Despite usual pressure of state officials to fabricate the results, hundreds of elections commissions across Belarus took a stand to count the votes in a fair way and showed real results of the election.

Prior to the election, Belarusian IT experts prepared two platforms, Zubr and Golos, for voters to check-in their ballots after marking it, to prove they voted for Tsikhanouskaya. As a result, Zubr and Golos received over 1 million responses with 500,000+ of them being photographed. They were able to prove that at least 30% of all polls [4] in Belarus were used by the state-controlled commissions to falsify data on the final reports. Moreover, the Central elections committee added another cap of an extra 20% votes to Lukashenka from what was

¹ Three other candidates were never considered the favorites of the run and were often labelled the “spoiler” candidates who presumably were

supported by the presidential administration and pushed into the electoral race by the state security.

already falsified and reported from local commissions with fake numbers.

Before the head of Central Elections Commission, Lidziya Yarmoshyna, announced the victory of Lukashenka with 80,1% result. The scale of falsifications organized by Aliaksandr Lukashenka and his subordinates was outrageous in the background of his actual unpopularity – and people flooded the streets of their cities.

On August 9-13, the state security and army brutally dispersed crowds using guns, stun grenades, and brutal violence that often ended in rape, sexual rape and torture. Then, thousands of people were detained every day [5]. Hundreds of them were tortured and raped [6] in the most violent ways at numerous detention centers and police offices. The internet connection was shut down by the state all across Belarus [7] within this period.

3. THE PORTRAIT OF BELARUSIAN PROTEST

Since the rise of Lukashenka in power 26 years ago, Belarus was deeply divided into two mutually non-recognizing concepts of Belarusian identity, or “Belarusianness”. One was a modernist pro-European and pro-democratic, urban-oriented kind of liberal nationalist identity. The other was Soviet-type conservative identity that looked for the examples of the future in socialist past and rural lifestyles: “Both consider themselves true Belarusians, both are certain that the other has betrayed Belarus and the Belarusian idea”.

By running a sultanistic regime, Lukashenka used their conflict to keep independent Belarus a country that followed most role models of his youth of a first-generation migrant from a BSSR village. His setup of values and vision was used by the Russian Federation to support his crusade against democracy and European future of Belarus and keep Belarus on Russia’ orbit.

On August 10, Tsikhanouskaya was kidnapped by Belarus state security officials from the building of the Central Election Committee and was forcibly removed into the territory of Lithuania. Although she was threatened that her husband will be killed, she never surrendered and decided to reclaim her victory – and organize new fair elections without Lukashenka.

Following popular protests all across Belarus, on August 14, president-elect Tsikhanouskaya announced the creation of the Coordination Council of Belarus Opposition to start the process of peaceful transit of power. The Council became the institution that fixed the creation of alternative center of power in Belarus. After this step, Tsikhanouskaya and her team started building alternative state structures to unite all supporters of changes.

However, it was Lukashenka, too, who united Belarusian people again in 2020 – however,



against himself and making people recall a motto “We are one nation”. In 2020, Belarus witnessed a previously barely acceptable combination of official red-green flags and national white-red-white flags risen together during most meetings in support of democratic changes.

Belarus has never been so united under Lukashenka’s rule – until the government brutally dispersed the protests in the second

week of August. After that, the official red-green flag became the symbol of violence, It was intentionally raised over paddy wagons at the times of violent attacks on civilians. In November, green-red flag was risen high up above a prison of Zhodzina where most detainees spend their days behind the bars after they were sentenced on political grounds if there is not enough space in detention centers in Minsk.

The ongoing social movement in Belarus is of tectonic character, and popular protest against Lukashenka will not stop in any foreseeable future. It includes people of all ages, backgrounds and civil social groups and ages (only lacking acting workers of state security, law enforcement and the army – however, beyond the top-executives and special units mentioned below in this work, the army yet refrains from active engagement in situation and the use of violence against the protesters).

The protest already has five key characteristics that can hardly be changed in a meanwhile. In September-October 2020, a key figure of Belarusian independent sociology, Prof. Andrei Vardamatski, conducted a research project [8] to identify key characteristics of 2020 protest movement in Belarus.

Prof. Vardamatski was able to identify the following five key characteristics of ongoing pro-democratic social movement:

- The threshold of pain that individual protester is ready to bare has shifted to more.
- Public fear of the regime has transformed into anger.
- The need to participate in the protests has turned into a positive psychological necessity for most participants of civil disobedience activities.
- The protesters are psychologically ready for a long-term protest and standoff;

- The protesters do not have a psychological need for leader's presence and prefer acting autonomously based on own vision of political necessity, "here and now".

The latter, self-organization and lack of need for a single leader, is of utmost importance for a civil movement in Belarus. Traditionally, within Lukashenka's dictatorship arresting opposition leaders without any reasonable grounds has been a long-lasting practice. And it effectively dispersed all protests since their leadership was removed.

Prof. Vardamatski compares [9] the practice of modern Belarusian protests (run on self-organization without a leader) with a school of fish. And, indeed, the behavior of protesters looks very synchronized and disciplined [10] to an extent that they, in Vardamatski's words, can "change its configuration, speed, and operate as a joint mechanism". The professor claims that no similar practice of civil disobedience has ever succeeded anywhere else, but in Belarus – since this strategy is born within local context and adjustability is a part of it.

Prof. Vardamatski compares the patterns of protest in Belarus to the ones in Hong Kong but argues that in Belarus this form of protest has become a self-sufficient dominant tool of civil disobedience movement. On top of unprecedented self-organization, Vardamatski mentions the phenomena of "voyaging leadership" (плавающее лидерство). Since the participation in resistance movement has become a psychological need for a large portion of the nation, the demand for leaders and active resistance immediately substitutes those leaders who happen being arrested. As a result, resistance continues without any significant breaks on a time scale of scheduled protest activity.

Indeed, the behavior of protesters is quite unique for resistance practices in modern Eurasia: the protesters prefer to not engage into direct confrontation with law enforcement, rather wear

them own physically and, especially, psychologically by using derogatory terminology, female shouts and absurdist behavior. For instance, a group of people may voluntarily ask to let them all into a riot van if a single member of a group was captured during the protest. Women often urge soldiers to shoot at them if the soldiers point guns against them in acts of intimidation. Women intentionally scream in soldiers faces to psychologically eliminate them. Another tactic widely used is to verbally humiliate police and soldiers if they happen popping up in residential areas, especially in places surrounded by high-stories residential buildings which makes the pressure psychologically unbearable.

In terms of non-violent resistance, the protesters never loot or arson private property or public property – apart from individuals episodes between August 9-13 when they built barricades out of street furniture to build barricades and protect people from direct gunshots of state security.

The protests engaged up to 1 million active participants over 3 months, and still showed a very low degree of radicalization. After the police brutally dispersed a few protest marches in Minsk city center, the protesters chose to localize protests and spray the forces of state security across the capital instead of gathering a fist in one spot.

Localization of protests led to the creation of dozens of pockets of “local communities” (in Western understanding of that term when neighbors are actively engaged in the life of the area they live in). This practice led to stabilization of protest groups, greater interconnectivity between their members, and growing mutual trust among the protesters. Local communities now, too, communicate with each other within their wider districts to coordinate joint rallies of a few residential areas.

After 26 years of authoritarian rule of Alexander Lukashenka in Belarus, the political and

economic system that was built by a former collective farm executive is now in a very shaky position – also because it was unable to match the changes and new popular demands within the society.

Although Alexander Lukashenka remained an illegal, but internally legitimate ruler in the last two decades because of stable electoral support, the elections of 2020 have completely compromised his legitimacy as a state leader both internally and externally.

Following Lukashenka’s secret inauguration on September 23, 2020, the European Union and individual EU member states, as well as the USA, the UK and Canada announced they will not recognize this individual as a legitimate leader of Belarus.

Despite initial slowness and reluctance of the West to take proactive part in Belarus crisis (that caused certain skepticism about the possibilities of pressure on the regime in the first weeks of the crisis), things have change a lot after 17 OSCE member states invoked [11] the OSCE Moscow Mechanism on Belarus in September 2020. The Report [12] under the Moscow Mechanism on Belarus that was prepared by Professor Wolfgang Benedek, Ph.D. has become the most important document and authoritative roadmap on the matter of atrocities conducted in by Belarus state officials in relation to civil population.

To a great extent, this document has set up the agenda and reasonable action plan for the next steps to be conducted [13] by the OSCE, Western governments, multilateral organizations, and – most importantly – the acting authorities of Belarus, to reestablish civil peace in this country.

As of late November 2020, the following key recommendations of the Report for OSCE member states and the international community require immediate application to put effective pressure on state security and forces yet loyal to Lukashenka:

- Establishing an independent international body for the in-depth investigation of human rights violations in the context of the presidential elections with the help of forensic experts.
- Participating in an international investigative mechanism of the human rights violations in the context of the presidential elections.
- Bringing perpetrators of torture and inhuman treatment among the Belarusian security forces and their responsible superiors to justice **wherever possible**.

Despite popular perception that the EU does not have enough leverage on the regime of Alexander Lukashenka, it is not entirely true (or to be precise, is totally not true). The European Union (and each of its member states) remains a large trade market for Belarus, but also an important source of goods and services – as well as a source of funding for state programs, infrastructure repairs and state-run business initiatives.

The perpetrators of gross human rights violations in Belarus have remained unpunished for almost three decades and freely entered the EU without being afraid of any prosecution, while the victims often suffered even more if they filed complaints against the wrongdoers who represented law enforcement or civil administration. For that reason, the prosecution of criminals and provision of justice to those who suffered from the regime’s criminal wrongdoings, is a matter of immediate need that will be viewed by the protesters as a strong move from the West, and will be feared by the members of state security who may become subject to criminal cases in the territory of any state outside Belarus since their wrongdoings are often subject to universal jurisdiction.

It is also necessary to realize that state security in Belarus does care about its status – and so do their families that will be subject to additional checks if their family members will be

acknowledged as members of terrorist groups. The United States supported the Moscow Mechanism’s report on Belarus. But in addition to this, James S. “Jim” Gilmore III, U.S. ambassador to OSCE, named abduction of political prisoners without any charges or a legitimate, real law to support such move, “an act of domestic terrorism” [14] (a similar term, “terrorist state”, was later used by the member of European Parliament Andrius Kubilius from Lithuania to describe the regime of Lukashenka – which also requires relevant response to the executives of such state). This is another effective tool to influence Belarus state security workers and their relatives.

Just recently, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya announced [15] that she will demand foreign governments and international organizations to acknowledge two units of Belarus ministry of interior that were especially violent towards the protesters, OMON (riot police) and GUBOPiK (the Main Department for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption of the Interior Ministry of Belarus) terrorist organizations. The announcement was made during a joint press conference with Stef Blok, the prime minister of the Netherlands, who expressed readiness to support this call for action.

Russia and China are among a few countries that recognized the elections of August 9, 2020 and acknowledged Lukashenka as a re-elected head of state. However, only Russia is actively engaging in the support of its satellite – despite toxic international image of Lukashenka that influences pro-Russian moods in the least pleasant way for the Kremlin.

Despite expressively peaceful character of protests, the regime of Lukashenka responds with brutality to any expression of dissident voices and any form of civil disobedience. If the violence of the state security will remain as brutal as it is late November, and it will be further increased, the future of peaceful resolution of the crisis in Belarus becomes a lot

more uncertain than it might seem. Russia is interested in Belarus remaining a zone of

instability, but it wouldn't agree to a civil war 450 kilometers away from Moscow.

4. REPRESSIONS

Meanwhile, Lukashenka moves in this direction. Over the last 110 days, more than 30,000 people were detained [16] in Belarus on political reasons. For the sake of comparison, the number of all politically-motivated detentions in Belarus in just 110 days (with no special legal status invoked nationwide) is already three times bigger than the number of people interned under 1981-1983 Martial Law in Poland, and is twice as big as the number of all people detained on political reasons by the “the Estado Novo” regime of António de Oliveira Salazar in Portugal in 36 years.

So far, at least four people were killed by law enforcement or in episodes directly related to the use of force by Belarus security officials. At least four other people died of violent impact related to repressions or state security engagement in disperse of dissident opinion, however without immediate proofs that show direct impact.

State officials loyal to Lukashenka authorized the creation of at least 43 “special patrol zones” in Minsk. These are the territories of urban residential housing where the local population has been the most active in conducting local / grassroots protests. The state is establishing a de-facto ghetto in areas where civilians did nothing, but placed national flags, sang songs, had joint meals, and gathered to discuss the political situation.

“Special patrol zones” were established days after a 31-year-old protester, painter Raman Bandarenka, was kidnapped and killed in Minsk by a group of people who came to vandalize the art in one of such areas supported by a group of

interior ministry employees who helped organize a kidnapping of Bandarenka and drove him away after he was severely beaten. Two of the vandals were later identified [17] as Dzmitry Baskau and Dzmitry Shakuta.

The first one is the head of Belarus Ice Hockey Federation, but other than that he is a close friend of Lukashenka family and personal trainer of Kolya Lukashenka, the longest son of the first president of Belarus. Dzmitry Shakuta is a professional fighter, trainer of Belarus special units, including SOBR (COBP / CAXP), and, too, a close friend of Alexander Lukashenka. Both are active members of groups that vandalize memorials and protest art in residential areas with the support of OMON and “Almaz” anti-terrorism unit of the ministry of interior that since recently performs [18] the functions of armed cover group for VIP vandals, including close friends of Lukashenka family, and, presumably, even his press-secretary, Natalliya Eismant [19].

It is reasonable to assume that unless Lukashenka steps down in the next 6 to 12 months, Belarus will be facing a low-intensity civil conflict characterized by armed skirmishes, sabotage of acting government and all state institutions by the majority of the population, disintegration of public services, disturbance and blockade of transit routes (primarily, the railroads), and, in worst case scenario, terrorist attacks targeting state security and law enforcement property and personnel as well as major civil infrastructure (without, however, targeting the civilians or non-security employed personnel in the latter case)

5. THE DISPOSITION OF PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT

As of late November 2020, the disposition of political sides of the crisis inside Belarus is represented by two “camps” characterized by mutual non-recognition. For the sake of practical convenience, these two groups will be further referred to as “democratic forces” on one side, and “the regime” on the other.

The group labelled as “democratic forces” includes all supporters of president-elect Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the Coordination Council and other pro-democratic groups and individuals acting in the interest of peaceful democratic transit, and actively participating in acts of peaceful civil disobedience of any kind. This camp is symbolically led by president-elect Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya who aims to achieve the following five goals:

- Unconditional resignation of Aliaksandr Lukashenka;
- New fair elections in compliance with international standards;
- Suspension of all violence against peaceful protesters;
- Investigation and prosecution of all officials responsible for crimes against civilians;
- Release of all political prisoners.

“The regime” includes a group of supporters of the first president of Belarus, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, who search political and business survival due to their direct dependency on the existing regime or represent Soviet-kind ultraconservative views.

While pro-Russian groups prefer to support the regime and Lukashenka, it is worth noting that a media group of four propagandistic websites run under the umbrella of Russia’s CIS-EMO (the websites mentioned above included “Берестье News”, “Витьбич”, “Гродно Daily” and “Поднепровье”) was unexpectedly shut down in November 2020. These four websites were a part of a nationwide network [20] created to spread the Kremlin’s propaganda in Belarus.

The shutdown happened days after two representatives of CIS-EMO projects, a Russian national Stanislav Byshok and a citizen of Belarus Siarhei Lushch announced their plans to set up a party in Belarus that will target anti-Lukashenka pro-Russian audiences.

The Kremlin seems being confused about the future of its foreign policy in relation to Belarus, but yet keeps a somewhat expectant position in the media – although openly claiming support to Lukashenka. Although Russia indeed has significant impact on “old bureaucracy” in Minsk, the Kremlin is now not in the best position to choose a substitute to Lukashenka from the list of his former allies. To avoid total drift of Belarus to the West, Russia may seek a “compromise” figure instead of Lukashenka who yet has to be accepted by the society, state security, and civil administration. Setting up a “Russian candidate” is not an easy task in given circumstances – which means Russia may equally try to play “controlled chaos” card keeping Belarus a grey buffer zone with smoldering conflict that would prevent Belarus from joining the EU and NATO.

Hence, it is again in the interest of the West to be more proactive in relation to the political crisis in Belarus to avoid a Transnistria look-alike across its border. However, Putin’s long-lasting unwillingness to realize the scale of repressions, uncontrollability of Lukashenka’s team, and people’s attitude to the first president of Belarus, may become the greatest mistake in the Kremlin’s foreign policy towards Belarus. Nevertheless, if Russia will continue to support Lukashenka with financial and natural resources, services, and equipment, the perspectives of democratization will be deferred and Belarus will transform into Europe’s largest grey zone with no rule of law and high risk of an armed civil conflict.

Meanwhile, in September-October 2020, the number of Belarusians who support the union with Russia decreased [21] by 11.6% – in favor

of pro-European moods. The degree of pro-Russian moods will continue to decrease for as long as Putin will continue supporting Lukashenka's regime. In a weird way, the more Putin will try to keep Belarus in pro-Russian orbit by supporting Lukashenka and the violence the latter orchestrates against the civil population, the further collective Belarus will be

drifting away from Russia. Hence, from a strategic standpoint, Vladimir Putin should've been the person the least interested in keeping Lukashenka in power: the more Russian president will support Lukashenka, the stronger pro-European aspirations would grow within Belarus

6. CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS

As of late November 2020, Belarus is facing a number of critical issues that affect political stability of the country and the region. They will be broadly discussed in this chapter.

A. The Duality of Power

The greatest threat to the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and civil peace of Belarus is the duality of power. While Alexander Lukashenka ceased to accept his failure and lack of popular support (and he will not until he is directly forced to do so), the national division will turn even deeper.

The duality of power is a dangerous path for the foundations of the Belarusian state as such. Since Russian Federation poses a direct military threat to the independence of Belarus in times of no clear leadership or effective control of any domestic party to the conflict, the duality of power poses a serious risk to the national security.

In October-November 2020 with new achievements of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in establishing direct contacts with European and American political leaders. Since the collective West started building coordinated hard position on the regime of Alexander Lukashenka, it increased cooperation with president-elect Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya who acquires more and more global recognition, while Lukashenka's "multi-vector foreign policy" now looks absolutely destroyed – to imitate dialogue in the West, Lukashenka is forced to meet barely recognizable politicians [22] with shady background.

Although Tsikhanouskaya does not execute effective control over the territory of Belarus in terms of international law, she remains the symbol of pro-democratic protests and the main contact of democratic forces in the West (along



with the Coordination Council created in coordination with Tsikhanouskaya to sustain peaceful transit of power). Despite numerous efforts of Tsikhanouskaya's team to publicly get in touch with the Kremlin, the latter yet rejects all efforts to maintain dialogue with anyone but Lukashenka and his regime.

Lukashenka yet continues to maintain control over state budget, taxation system, top executives of the army, civil administration, and – most importantly – the so-called law enforcement. Nevertheless, his popularity among the civil population is now at historic low.

Still, Lukashenka has lost the information war to Tsikhanouskaya. Immediately after the events of August 9-13, about 1/4 (80 people) [23] of employers left state-owned ONT TV channel and up to 1/3 (100 people) [24] of Belarusian State TV and Radio Company's workers quit their jobs. Soon after that, Belarusian propaganda was run by Russia's media advisers from Russia's state owned RT. Against the unification of narratives on Belarusian and Russian TV, and the use of hate speech and calls for violence against the civil population, on Belarus state television, the local audience lost the remains of its trust to Belarus state television.

In a recent research conducted by Russia Institute of King's College London and British think tank Sociolytics Ltd (UK) in September-

October 2020, only 12% of respondents stated [25] they trust Belarusian state TV. As was mentioned, within that same period, the number of people supporting the union with Russia decreased [26] by 11.6%, and it will naturally continue to decrease for as long as the Kremlin supports Lukashenka's regime.

B. The crisis of state governance: qualified state administrators quit their jobs

Following August 9 events, hundreds of highly qualified professionals quit their jobs at a wide range of civil ministries and state security agencies. In the ministry of foreign affairs only, dozens of employees quit their jobs as civil servants. This includes dozens [27] of diplomats employed at the central office as well as ambassadors, diplomats and consular workers hired by foreign missions of the Republic of Belarus at the European Union, EU member states (including publicly announced cases in Slovakia, Latvia, and Poland), as well as UAE, India, Chile, Argentina, and other remote countries.

By pushing out experienced strategic thinkers and managers, the regime multiplies mistakes and increases the workload of the remaining personnel. Unstable political situation and overwhelming workload of all personnel increases the risk of growing political instability.

C. Growing politically motivated violence

The acting authorities show deliberate obsession with political persecution of any dissident voices. If escalation of violence and repressions will continue, the protests will inevitably transform from peaceful to more violent forms if the central government will continue to tighten the legislation and repress the civilians under poorly grounded rationale. Based on growing number of incidents involving the destruction of property belonging to law enforcement employees, and provocative

attacks on law enforcement offices presumably conducted by the state security, we may assume that Belarus is facing a probability of a low-intensity conflict and "controlled chaos" undercover operations of state security to discredit peaceful protests.

D. Belarus is facing a severe economic crisis combining a few reasons.

Belarusian annual GDP is estimated at around \$60 billion. Since 2019, this country is impacted by the change to Russia's oil trade tax rules that would cost Belarus up to 5.2% of its annual \$60 billion GDP [28] in the next 3 years, according to Bloomberg Tax source at International Monetary Fund. There is an opinion that Belarus might be facing a default [29] on its external debt over the span of less than 24 months if the state reserves will be spent on holding the exchange rate of the national currency and other non-profile goals.

Then, the national economy was hit by COVID-19 pandemic and Belarusian ruble has lost around 30% of its value over 10 months. To protect it from devaluation during August events, the acting government has already spent over \$1.5 billion since August. While state reserves were estimated at around \$9 billion then, by mid-November they decreased to \$7 billion – which is enough to sustain sovereign debt returns in the next 24 months, if only this money is not needed for other goals.

On November 19, international credit ratings agency Fitch Ratings downgraded [30] its outlook on the Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) of Belarus from "stable" to "negative" following the same move [31] by another major credit rating agency, Standard & Poor's, made in September.

According to Valery Belsky, aide to Lukashenka for matters of the financial and credit system, in just the first ten days of the confrontation, the government estimated the damage from protests in excess of \$500 million [32]. Then, however, the deferred damage was already estimated in

the billions following the damage to “investment appeal” and the breakdown of “foreign loan system”. All that prior to Western sanctions, mass outflow of capital and workers.

It is yet hard to estimate the financial impact of sanctions imposed on major state companies and private businesses related to Lukashenka’s close circle, but these may put an end to certain industries if kept long causing unavoidable collateral damage to the population.

However, in fields like high tech, people prefer to leave before the conditions become unbearable. Since early August, Belarus is experiencing a major exodus of IT talents, mainly the employees of Belarus High Tech Park residents. Over 1,200 IT experts moved to Ukraine by mid-October (that will potentially bring \$120 million of annual foreign currency inflow into the economy of Ukraine [33]). Within that same time, another 800 high-tech workers from Belarus chose to relocate to Poland by using Poland. Business Harbour. program [34] that was introduced in September 2020 following the crackdown on IT industry in Belarus.

E. The second wave of COVID-19 pandemic hits Belarus a lot harder

Since the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020, Belarusian authorities applied a “covidiot” kind of response to the novel coronavirus infection following Lukashenka’s view of that problem. However, by autumn 2020 the first “visible” measures, such as obligatory mask regime, were introduced in public spaces across the country. Although the official statistics are completely compromised and cannot be trusted by any means, the ministry of health confirms that the number of cases in November 2020 is already 50% bigger than during the spring peak – and keeps counting.

F. Threats to state sovereignty as Russia increases pressure

Russia is long demanding greater engagement of Belarus within the so-called Union State, which

despite the name yet remains an organization rather than a country. Direct annexation of Belarus in a fashion similar to the Crimea is now unbearable to Russia for a number of factors: the cost of the operation, potential anti-war movement recoil inside Russia, dangerously short distance from Belarusian border to Moscow, lack of broad social support for Russian annexation in the territory of Belarus, and heated population that is already resisting internal forces of their own country. Altogether, these factors make new Crimea-fashioned operation too risky and expensive for Russia itself.

However, Russia is instead using the tactics of “soft annexation” [35]. The Kremlin’s expectation is to squeeze and coerce Alexander Lukashenko into the Union State through economic means (such as common currency), common foreign policy and media strategy. Finally, Russian Federation pushes Lukashenka for a facade-painting “constitutional reform” that would establish a Russia-like system of the state with a parliament formed of systemic parties. With that move, Russia will be able to fill the Belarusian parliament with pro-Russian parties to acquire the legislative branch of power [36] before moving to the rest (which generally remains a place for honorable retirement of the elderly bureaucrats and maintains an ultimately formal role).

This risk is amplified by the ideological work conducted in the Belarusian army and state security – the Russian Federation is rarely considered a foreign, moreover a hostile, state that may carry out an annexation without any chances to return independence.

7. POLICY OPTIONS / SCENARIOS

As of late November 2020, there is a total of four² main subjects related to the crisis that may take proactive steps to resolve it.

1. The supporters of the Coordination Council and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya – who in our estimate represent up to 85% of the population of Belarus. Since independent politically-related sociology in Belarus is de-facto illegal, and no actual numbers on the matter are available, this estimation is based on a combination of factors including a level of trust to state media (that perform the function of Lukashenka’s PR service and fell to 4,2% in pre-elections July 2020), pre-elections level of trust to Lukashenka officially reported in March 2020 at the level of 24% in Minsk, and closed sociology data delivered to our team between August 9-23, 2020 that reflected 8,9% trust rating to Lukashenka nationwide. Hence, up to 85% of the population can be defined as “consolidated pro-democratic movement” for which Tsikhanouskaya and CC are central figures / symbols of resistance.
2. The countries of the collective “West” (the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Canada, and – under certain conditions – the Balkans and Ukraine) and relevant multilateral organizations, including NATO.
3. Russian Federation (and its allies under the Collective Security Treaty Organization).
4. The clan of Aliaksandr Lukashenka: state security, armed forces, bureaucrats, businessmen, and a small group of supporters loyal to the acting regime representing a maximum of 12% of the population of Belarus.

The trends observed since early summer 2020 bring us to a conclusion that Belarus may be facing four basic scenarios in the upcoming 6-12 months based on current disposition of power, and steps taken by each of four above mentioned subjects to this crisis.

A. Standoff / “Position War”

Under this scenario, the democratic forces and the regime will remain in a stalemate resembling to current situation. While the regime will ease the repressions and violence (but will not completely refrain from using them), the protesters will be reluctant to radicalize and conquer new strategic gains. With the West refraining from increasing its pressure on the regime, Russia will continue to support Lukashenka in exchange to pieces of Belarusian sovereignty and subsequent annexation of Belarus under “the Union State” agenda. This format of confrontation will gradually turn Belarus into Russia’s protectorate, and, subsequently, will dissolve most elements of sovereignty of Belarus within a decade keeping it a lifelong “area of instability” similar to modern Transnistria with a population hostile to both Russia and the regime. This option remains likely unless the West puts economic pressure on the Russian Federation in addition to new sanctions on the regime and wider support and

² Although China recognized the elections, it is intentionally removed from this equation due to its neutrality and [public] non-engagement into the conflict. We assume Chinese leadership will refrain from making long-running political affiliations or endorsement of any political power in Belarus, including the acting authorities – except for purely ceremonial appreciations of non-involvement of external powers into internal affairs of Belarus and diplomatic announcement that China respects the choice of Belarusian people and expect the return of peace under Lukashenka’s leadership.

recognition of democratic forces, or if only Russia doesn't realize Lukashenka is too toxic as a long-term partner for future contacts.

B. The Final Push

By significantly increasing the brutality and scale of repressions, Lukashenka will decapitate the protests and will completely burn down the realm of civil society and private businesses. This will turn Belarus into a completely totalitarian state and the largest economic and humanitarian “grey zone” of Europe. With West being reluctant to support Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the Coordination Council, Lukashenka will remain unpunished. The Russian Federation will increase pressure on Lukashenka, but he will refrain from deepening any integration projects with the Kremlin due to complete dissolution of trust between him and Putin. This scenario will result into an unprecedented exodus of economically active population and refugees from Belarus into neighboring countries. The outflow of people and capital will turn Belarus into an ultimately isolationist state whose travel policies (including exit visas and exit bans) will vary on a broad spectrum from light version of the East Germany (GDR) to a regime resembling hardcore Socialist Albania under Enver Hoxha's rule.

C. Dramatic Emancipation

Under this scenario, the protest movement will keep growing despite dramatic growth of violence practices by regime. Under this scenario, Russia will continue to provide economic support to Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime to sustain his rule – while Western countries will be denied any opportunity to support the protesters despite their strong political will to do so. Growing state violence against peaceful protests will result into a full-fledged revolt run by the means of terrorist attacks and political killings targeting state officials, security and law enforcement bodies (including army officers) as well as civil and military infrastructure (foremost – bridges, roads, and railroads) halting major transit routes. In such case, Belarus will become a “grey zone” / “failed state” with a high risk of terrorist activity. Lukashenka will be removed from power in a violent way by a group of state security officials, but the country will remain unstable for a long time with poor perspectives of democratization.

D. Coercion to National Dialogue and Peace

Under this scenario, Aliaksandr Lukashenka will be forced to step down through a joint effort of protesters, Western countries and Russia that will be coerced to cooperate under the threat of severe economic sanctions. The West will actively engage in situation by forcing the Russian Federation to stop any support to Lukashenka and his regime by imposing broad range of sanctions targeting Russian businesses and individuals related to financial deals with the Republic of Belarus and Aliaksandr Lukashenka's clan. Following the resignation of Lukashenka, a transit of power will be conducted along with new elections of the president and the parliament. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the Coordination Council will fulfill their mission as temporary leadership institutes and will sustain the execution of international support under “Marshall's Plan for Belarus”.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Moscow Mechanism

Foremost, Lithuania, EU and NATO must fully support the findings and recommendations of OSCE Rapporteur's Report under the Moscow Mechanism on Alleged Human Rights Violations related to the Presidential Elections of 9 August 2020 in Belarus (prepared by Professor Dr. Wolfgang Benedek). We would like to pay attention to the following key recommendations of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Report for OSCE member states and the international community:

- Establish an independent international body for the in-depth investigation of human rights violations in the context of the presidential elections with the help of forensic experts.
- Participate in an international investigative mechanism of the human rights violations in the context of the presidential elections.
- Bring perpetrators of torture and inhuman treatment among the Belarusian security forces and their responsible superiors to justice wherever possible.
- Extend technical assistance to Belarus for preparing new presidential elections and to undertake the suggested legal reforms.
- Provide assistance to individuals who were forcibly displaced or forced to leave Belarus and / or are seeking refuge or treatment of injuries as a result of torture and ill-treatment.
- Grant asylum in cases of persecution covered under the Geneva Refugee Convention.
- Demand new presidential elections run under international monitoring and in compliance with international standards.
- Demand the implementation of the above recommendations by the acting government of Belarus.

B. Recognize Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as a legitimate leader

This would imply she is entitled to conduct the transit of power in Belarus, strengthen and support her in this position. Fully recognize the Coordination Council as the only legal and legitimate representatives of the Republic of Belarus.

Continue non-recognition of Lukashenka. Refrain from any recognition of this individual as well as top-level acting government officials (namely – ministerial and vice-ministerial level) as legal and legitimate representatives of the Republic of Belarus, and work with mid- and low-level officials to stimulate the division between them and mature colleagues.

Impose diplomatic practices targeted to division of acting pro-Lukashenka “vertical of power” in Belarus by refraining from any official contacts with acting top executives representing Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime – in favor of mid-level nomenclature to minimize administrative weight and influence of Lukashenka's allies, both internationally and nationally.

Refrain from recognition of Uladzimir Makei as legit foreign minister of Belarus in favor of relevant diplomatic representative agreed upon by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the Coordination Council.

Impose pressure on mid-level civil and military administrations in Belarus to organize new presidential elections under international monitoring and in line with international best practices and

ensuring all technical assistance to the Republic of Belarus to undertake such elections, and subsequent reforms.

C. Immediately impose targeted restrictive measures on Lukashenka's close circle of businessmen and businesses – block all revenue channels.

Since Belarusian judicial system cannot provide legal protection to civil population of Belarus, all foreign states should support an international investigative mechanism that will bring to criminal justice – wherever possible – the perpetrators and superiors responsible for gross violations of human rights in Belarus (including, but not limited to, election frauds, arbitrary detentions, obstruction to journalistic work, torture, inhuman treatment, kidnappings, and politically-motivated killings conducted by Belarusian security forces, military, paramilitary, and representatives of civil administration);

Introduce targeted sanctions against all private businesses and individuals related to Aliaksandr Lukashenka's close circle due to corruption exposure, their role in support of the regime and management of repressions against employees and independent trade unions.

Introduce targeted personal sanctions against all members of both chambers of the so-called parliament and their immediate relatives (including spouses). Introduce targeted personal sanctions against all top-level representatives of the so-called government of Belarus (including spouses).

D. Establish an international investigative body on Lukashenka regime crimes against Belarusian citizens, as recommended in the OSCE Moscow Mechanism report, and explore all available options to bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice wherever possible.

Establish an independent international body for the in-depth investigation of human rights violations in the context of the presidential elections with the help of forensic experts (most preferably – in the form of international criminal tribunal), as well as Belarus human rights watchdogs, ZUBR and GOLOS online platforms.

In support of OSCE Moscow Mechanism Report's findings, the European Parliament called for the EU to lend support to an international investigation of crimes perpetrated by the Lukashenka regime against the people of Belarus. The EP also supported the idea of the establishment of an evidence collection center and an EU task force of international law experts to assist in future international investigations.

The EP called on the Commission, the Member States and the EEAS to provide full support to the efforts of the UN Human Rights Council and the OSCE Moscow Mechanism, as well as human rights defenders and civil society, to ensure documentation and reporting of human rights violations and subsequent accountability and justice for victims. We recommend all EU member states to support these actions.

We also recommend to immediately acknowledge (both officially and legally) the practices of targeted political repressions against civilians, including national, religious and sexual minorities, as well as the use of torture and inhuman treatment of civil population in the territory of Belarus on and after August 9, 2020 by the state officials of the Republic of Belarus as an act of genocide as defined under Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948): “[...] acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to

bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part [...]“. These practices include repressions particularly targeted against Belarusian-speaking minority: members of this group are being marked with spray paint and tortured in especially violent ways in detention centers.

Immediate further steps should include official and legal acknowledgement of all members of Belarus interior ministry’s “Almaz” unit, SOBR (SAHR / СОБР / САХР), ОМОН (АМАР / ОМОН / АМАП) units, ГУВОРiК (GUBAZiK / ГУБОПiК / ГУБАЗiК) units, and Military Unit No. 3214 of the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as KGB’s “Alpha” (Альфа) unit, as well as the 5th Spetsnaz Brigade (5-ая отдельная бригада специального назначения / 5-я ОБрСпН Сил специальных операций Республики Беларусь) and 38th Guards Air Assault Brigade of the Armed Forces of Belarus (38-я Брестская отдельная гвардейская Венская Краснознамённая десантно-штурмовая бригада / 38-я гв. ОДШБр) as organized terrorist groups to put additional pressure on the regime and ensure collective pursue and criminal prosecution of each and every member of these organizations that played key role in conducting punitive operations against the civilians including the use of torture and politically motivated kidnappings murders of peaceful protesters.

We also recommend acknowledging the activity of the above-mentioned units and related paramilitaries («дружинники») against the civilians as acts of domestic terrorism and bringing all perpetrators of atrocities against the civil population to justice – wherever possible.

Additionally, we recommend to legally judge the above mentioned security units as criminal organizations for their role in illegal application of lethal / non-lethal weaponry against civilians, the use of torture, inhuman treatment, as well as their participation in organization and management of genocide of civil population within 43 “special patrol zones” in Minsk, in detention centers and within the whole territory of Belarus wherever applicable.

E. Investigate and expand the circle of those responsible for crimes conducted before, during or after August 9, 2020 against the civil population.

This measure should include issuing arrest warrants using national universal jurisdiction and impose targeted restrictive measures on those responsible for repressions and rigged elections.

The regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka remains standing for 26 years due to absolute impunity of all officials responsible for human rights violations. Since early 2000s, there has been no officials charged for politically motivated police violence and rigged elections (moreover - fraud practices were imposed and stimulated by the administration of Aliaksandr Lukashenka under a threat of reprisals).

Since the Republic of Belarus denies its citizens access to basic human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to a fair trial and the independence of the judiciary, all foreign countries are urged to initiate criminal pursue and prosecution of all individuals and officials responsible for state-orchestrated violence and calls in support to violence and rejecting the facts of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment that were imposed on political prisoners and inmates of detention centers who were incarcerated on political grounds. All perpetrators of human rights violations in Belarus must be brought to account.

The impunity for human rights abuses is a fundamental pillar of Lukashenka’s regime. Since Belarusian acting authorities ceased to fulfill their international obligations and OSCE commitments, and all state bodies, including law enforcement, judicial system, parliament, and government are now operating with a sole purpose of sustaining the rule of Alexander Lukashenka through repressions

against his ideological opponents and peaceful protesters, all foreign governments and international organizations are strongly urged to impose judicial pursuit of those engaged into repressions in Belarus.

For that purpose, we strongly recommend all NATO member states to investigate (along with OSCE and all interested parties) the politically motivated crimes conducted by Belarus officials in relation to presidential elections of August 9, 2020, and subsequent repressions and punitive operations against civil population. We urge NATO countries to expand the circle of those responsible for crimes against Belarusian citizens, and issue international arrest warrants using national universal jurisdiction to ensure criminal pursuit of the following groups of Belarusian and Russian citizens:

- All civil and military officials involved in coordination and execution of political repressions;
- All civil and military officials involved in coordination and execution of rigged elections;
- All businessmen involved in corruption-led artificial monopolies and oligopolies involving Belarus officials;

We urge NATO member countries to arrest all property and accounts of such individuals in their sovereign territories or issue arrest orders to chase these individuals in all foreign jurisdictions. Additionally, we recommend all member state to investigate Lukashenka and his close circle – including businessmen, assets and revenue channels – on national and international level.

F. Work with national businesses in their countries, including banks, to close all revenue channels to the illegal and illegitimate regime and its servants.

Calls for a complete freeze on all EU fund transfers, including loans from the European Investment Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and others, to the current Belarusian Government and state-controlled projects; calls on the EEAS to suspend negotiations on the EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities until free and fair presidential elections have taken place;

The European Parliament called on the EU to freeze all fund transfers of the European Union to Belarusian state institutions and state-controlled projects (including the loans of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development as well as the European Investment Bank loans). This is a step that has to be followed by other foreign governments. The regime of Alexander Lukashenka has to be deprived of any foreign assistance and financial support. Instead, all help and support should be delivered to Belarus via private sector good-standing companies and properly cleared Belarusian NGOs that will have no connection to state organizations, governments, the families of state officials or government and state officials whatsoever, and will be regularly monitored to avoid any collaboration with the regime.

G. Support Belarusian civil society in and outside the country and entrepreneurship.

This point specifically includes the initiatives that aim to build an alternative / underground state in the territory of Belarus to sustain democracy transit and non-violent resistance.

Inter alia, this recommendation includes support to human rights defenders and civil society organizations promoting and protecting human rights. Based on the findings of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Report we also recommend to provide legal and technical support for the necessary constitutional and legal reforms using existing specialized bodies like the Venice Commission on Democracy through Law or the International Bar Association.

Facilitate the involvement of the UN special procedures in the protection and promotion of human rights as well as the establishment of a country office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights in Belarus to assist in the transformation to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Support the Marshall Plan for Belarus and assisting in development of a roadmap of reforms and political transit.

- Request Belarusian Round Table Talks between the representatives of the acting government of Belarus on one side and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the Coordination Council.
- Continue efforts at facilitating a dialogue between all actors in Belarus.
- Monitor the establishment of human rights, democracy and the rule of law based on the recommendations made by the rapporteur under the Moscow Mechanism.

H. Work to establish a transatlantic “Marshall Plan for Belarus”.

In October 2020, the EU leaders approved a Polish economic aid plan created for Belarus along with Visegrad countries. The plan initially included a €1 billion stabilization fund and visa-free travel for Belarusians to the Schengen zone to stimulate democratic changes in that country after the resignation of Lukashenka.

Such plan of financial assistance for Belarus, which is now being reviewed by the European Commission, should encourage the state bureaucracy to defect from the regime of Lukashenka in favor of democratic governance. The plan should include clear steps and measures to assist Belarusian business and needs to be amplified in financial terms since current amount is very generous but is rather symbolic even for Belarus.

The “Marshall Plan for Belarus” should be treated as a long-term investment in the stability of Eastern Partnership area and broader EU neighborhood, not just Belarus.

I. Deter Kremlin from meddling into Belarusian affairs and use targeted restrictive measures if necessary.

This is one of the key issues investing into the success of democratic forces in Belarus. The Western coalition must keep the grip onto Lukashenka’s clan as well as related businesses and individuals that are directly backing the existence of the regime by running businesses in the interest of Lukashenka family and using from preferred conditions that form oligopolies or monopolies in certain conditions.

But other than this, the Western countries should be ready to introduce sanctions against Russian businesses, state-owned enterprises and entrepreneurs engaged in business activities that sustain the regime or use potentially corruptive schemes. This instruments should effectively put the pressure on Lukashenka’s backers in and outside the Kremlin and will force the Russian Federation to be more likely to cooperate with the West on the matter of Lukashenka’s removal and bringing him to justice.

It is extremely important to avoid the “Finlandization” of Belarus. This means that no decisions on the future of Belarus should be made above the head of its legal and legitimate representatives, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the Coordination Council. There shall be no consignment or coercion of Belarus membership into Russia’s integration projects of whatever nature – be it Eurasian Economic Union or CSTO.

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