



Institute for International Studies

Дебаты «Актуальный диалог»

Тенденции развития обстановки в Белоруссии и вокруг нее

Debates «Dialogue on Urgent Issues»

Current Trends in and around Belarus



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“Dialogue on Urgent Issues”



I am pleased to announce that the MGIMO Institute for International Studies [has launched](#) the series of Academic Debates “Dialogue on Urgent Issues”¹ in order to promote expert dialogue on topical international issues. Hosted by MGIMO, the events are by invitation only, aimed for Russian and international experts, diplomats, and political observers.

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"Current Trends in and around Belarus"

October 21st, 2021 at 15:00–18:00, MGIMO University, Room 423.

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Recommendations on the sources of expert information on Belarus in English

Minsk Dialogue minskdialogue.by

Belarusian Track-II initiative focused on international affairs and security in Eastern Europe. The Minsk Dialogue's team and its expert network produce analytical reports, policy papers, commentaries, backgrounders, and conference non-papers, which are widely distributed among the relevant international stakeholders.

Minsk Barometer – project of the Minsk Dialogue, regularly updated analysis of Belarus's foreign policy and security status by the analysts of the Minsk Dialogue.

Recommendations on the sources of expert information on Belarus in Russian

Belarusian Institute for Strategic Research bisr.gov.by

Government-sponsored think tank created in Belarus 2019 to provide internal expertise to the state structures and institutions. Publishes open analytical comments and reports on domestic developments and foreign policy of Belarus.

Center for the study of integration perspectives
www.perspectivecenter.org

Independent Russian think tank, which provides applied analysis of integration trends in Eurasia. Recent reports feature such topics as the influence of sanctions of the industrial sector of Belarus; the influence of pandemic over the economy of the Union State of Russia and Belarus.

Eurasia.Expert <https://eurasia.expert>

Russia-based information resource, which publishes expert comments on developments in the Eurasian region. The resource is co-founded by the State Academic University for the Humanities.

Controlled Chaos or Indivisible Security? Current Trends in Eurasian Integration Development

A.V. Rusakovich, Professor, Belarusian State University

On October 8, 2021, the JUSCANZ Group and the European Union held a high-level meeting of the UN Security Council on the situation in the Republic of Belarus. As planned by the sponsors of the meeting, it was an Arria-formula meeting. This very format has long served as a way to resolve difficult issues, for example, during discussions on the financing of terrorism. Until recently it was an effective negotiation format, largely due to its confidentiality. Since 2016 amid attempts to resolve the conflict in Syria this format has become subject to a high degree of politicization. In short, the format has been used to achieve unilateral political and economic goals through universal norms and mechanisms of the UN system.

Apparently, the international nature of the Arria formula serves as a pretext for interference in the internal affairs of the Republic of Belarus. There are three main characteristics of this meeting that prove this. Firstly, the principle of the confidentiality of negotiations was violated, as the event was broadcasted on social media. Secondly, third parties, such as IT companies and corporations with questionable financing transparency, whose activities can hardly be recognised as universal, were involved in organizing the event. Thirdly, the meeting was focused on human rights, which not only falls outside the mandate of the Security Council, but is also inconsistent with the principles of the UN Charter, in particular with the principle of sovereignty and the principle of cooperation in promoting human rights, enshrined in Article 1, Paragraph 3.

Interference in internal affairs is not a new phenomenon in international relations, especially for the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The aim of my report is not to “talk the talk” about how bad the interference is. The problem with interference is that such actions undermine universal mechanisms that have functioned effectively since the end of World War II. The actions of certain states, as well as other international actors, reflect a policy adopted by certain groups aimed at using supposedly “universal” mechanisms to sow “controlled chaos” in the post-Soviet space rather than create a single indivisible security system.

At a certain point in history the Helsinki Final Act had great potential for building an indivisible security system. However, those were different times: the Treaty of Moscow between the USSR and the Federal Republic of Germany, signed in 1970, and comprehensive agreements between the USSR and the US in the early 1970s made it possible to initiate the Helsinki process and enabled the Federal Republic of Germany and German Democratic Republic to become members of the United Nations. Unfortunately, in the 1990s Helsinki’s success was replaced by

destructive attempts to “bury” all possible integration efforts of the CIS countries and cooperation between NATO/European Union and post-Soviet structures. Therefore, it is the United Nations main bodies, which have achieved the most in terms of building a system of collective security. But this system is not in its best shape because of the contradiction between the principle of the sovereign equality of states and actual absence of such equality in economic development.

How can we prevent the spread of “controlled chaos”? At first glance, it might seem that abolishing some mechanisms or reforming them, as in the case of the UN Security Council, might produce a positive outcome. In my view, that road leads to a dead end. Reforming the Security Council, for example, is only possible through reforming the UN Charter, and the very initiative to revise any provision of the UN Charter would open a Pandora's Box. This is the reason why the UN Trusteeship Council still exists.

The creation of alternative mechanisms and the improvement of existing ones also will not replace “controlled chaos” with indivisible security. Attempts to reform the monitoring and peacekeeping bodies of the UN and OSCE could in theory be effective, but in practice they have often led to forceful interventions. This was the case with the UN Human Rights Council’s preliminary country-by-country discussion on the situation in Libya, as well as with the shift of the monitoring focus of OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE Commissioner on National Minorities.

The increasing complexity of cooperation forms and funding channels of international institutions creates additional challenges for the indivisible security system. Private sector’s actions on active financing of international organizations and their experts have already been named “privatization”. The problem of privatization is that the economic profits from a small group of transnational corporations and foundations create political costs, and it is the states that will have to deal with them.

In this context, the development of regional and interregional cooperation based on universally recognized norms of international law and the strengthening of integration through the Union State, the Eurasian Economic Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Collective Security Treaty Organization hold considerable potential for curbing controlled chaos and moving toward indivisible security. Boosting the activities of these structures within the framework of the United Nations is a promising idea.

The strengthening of ties between Eurasian integration structures and integration structures of the regions of Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa is another promising policy for the construction of the indivisible security system. If in the twentieth century the success of initiatives of building a security system could not be implemented without the support of the USSR and the United States, today the construction of such a system requires the broad consent of all major world coalitions. The problems associated with “controlled chaos” are common to all states, and thus there is a demand for a predictable system of indivisible security.

At the same time, it is today that we have structural opportunities to influence the global agenda.

An example of these opportunities is the UN Human Rights Council session held in September. It is known that country-specific Council resolutions are one of the most politicized mechanisms – this kind of resolutions, aimed at condemning and interfering in internal affairs do not promote dialogue on human rights. Nearly all these resolutions were initiated by the JUSCANZ group and the EU. For the first time in the history of the UNHRC, a Western country resolution was rejected by a majority vote. Certainly, the situation in Yemen is different from the situation in Belarus, as one state is classified as a “hotspot” for diplomatic service and the other country is one of the most favorable places for a foreign assignment. But the Western states’ resolution against Yemen has much in common with similar UNHRC resolutions on Belarus: it ignores the state’s right to sovereign development, de facto establishes an entire office for country monitoring within the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and creates a channel for informational control over expert reports through mechanisms of additional private sector funding. The resolution on Yemen requested \$8 million for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The most recent similar country resolution on Belarus was not rejected, even though it was strongly opposed by many nations of the world. In June, the Human Rights Council passed the resolution on Belarus by 21 votes to 19, with 7 abstentions. The recent vote on Yemen ended in a similar way. Despite the differences on regional matters, Arab and African states have opted for indivisible security rather than chaos. Our region is gradually making steps in this direction as well.

The Republic of Belarus currently operates in a difficult international environment. Considering the geopolitical position and the existing situation, the emphasis has recently been placed on the consolidation of integration structures in the post-Soviet space with the participation of Belarus, on the development of ties with Asia, African and Latin American countries, and intensification of multilateral diplomacy. At the same time, it should be noted that the proposals of the Belarus Republic to restart a comprehensive dialogue on international security issues, to implement the concept of “integration of integrations”, and to form a digital neighborhood belt remain valid and contribute to a positive agenda, aimed at creation of a community of nations based on the principles of equality, social justice, openness, trust and shared responsibility.

Minsk Announces Possible Changes to its Foreign Policy²

Yauheni Preiherman,
Director, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations

Like what occurred after most previous presidential campaigns in Belarus, the European Union and the United States did not recognize the official election results as legitimate and introduced new sanctions against Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime. The latter retaliated by implementing its own restrictive measures against EU officials, downgrading its participation in the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative and demanding that EU members Poland and Lithuania (seen in Minsk as the main drivers behind the European sanctions) downsize their embassies and recall ambassadors for consultations. Moreover, in response to each new package of sanctions, Minsk increased the level of repression inside Belarus.

All this has ignited a fully-fledged diplomatic crisis between Belarus and the EU, effectively reversing the efforts to normalize Belarusian-Western relations undertaken in the preceding years.

Ukraine's desire to move the venue for Donbas peace talks from Minsk elsewhere further aggravated the situation and undermined Belarus's efforts to establish itself as geopolitically neutral ground in Europe's East, which shaped its foreign policy thinking in 2014–2020.

As a result, semi-official voices began to emerge, arguing that Minsk should change its foreign policy course. For example, the chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the parliament's lower chamber, Andrei Savinykh, made a public case that the multi-vector concept, which Belarus has adhered to since the early 1990s, no longer serves the interests of the country. Instead, in his opinion, Belarus should drop its futile attempts to develop relations with the West and start bandwagoning with Russia on all major international issues.

However, this line of thought did not receive support during the ABPA. On the contrary, both President Lukashenka and Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makei stressed that multi-vectorism should remain the guiding foreign policy principle even under current circumstances. The latter contended that many of Belarus's achievements in the past three decades were made possible only thanks to its multi-vector foreign policy. Moreover, he underscored that Minsk remains interested in a strong EU and a strong Transatlantic partnership.

² Originally published in the Eurasian Daily Monitor, 19.02.2021. Also published on the Minsk Dialogue's web portal: <https://minskdialogue.by/en/research/opinions/minsk-announces-possible-changes-to-its-foreign-policy>

While amid the diplomatic confrontation with the West such rhetoric might have raised some eyebrows in Minsk, Moscow and even Western capitals, it is comprehensible and was readily predictable for at least three reasons.

First, given the ongoing transformation of the international system, preserving multi-vectorism is still a prudent line for Belarus to follow. Unlike what the proponents of changing the foreign policy concept have argued, growing great power competition opens up new diplomatic and economic opportunities for a small state like Belarus. By making use of these opportunities, the state expands its room for international maneuver and, thus, improves its resilience in the face of multiple geopolitical risks and uncertainties. On the contrary, bandwagoning with a single great power under such international circumstances would amount to effectively abandoning sovereignty.

Second, the country's "small open economy" requires a multi-vectored foreign policy. In other words, Belarus is vitally dependent on foreign trade, and the Russian/Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) market alone simply cannot provide for all of its needs.

And third, according to various available public opinion polls from the recent and more distant past, no single foreign policy vector enjoys the support of the absolute majority of Belarusians. Hence, dropping the multi-vectored concept would only aggravate the already grave problem of polarization in society and further undermine the country from within.

Yet while the ABPA made a clear case for preserving Belarus's multi-vectored foreign policy, it still produced some ambiguity, which led to numerous contradictory and even antithetical interpretations in the media. The ambiguity resulted from two other proposals made by Makei. Namely, he suggested that Article 18 of the acting Constitution, which says that Belarus "pledges itself to become a neutral state," be amended. In his opinion, the pledge no longer corresponds to international realities. Also, he put forward the idea that the government should amend the so-called "33-33-33" formula of foreign trade diversification. It now stipulates that a third of all exports should go to Russia/EEU, another third to the EU, and yet another third to other countries of the world. According to Makei, in its new version the formula should look like "50 [Russia/EEU]–25 [EU]–25 [rest of the world]."

The ambiguity grew following Makei's words that the foreign ministry pledges to "prepare a new foreign policy concept" in light of recent developments. For inattentive Belarus watchers, this might, indeed, have sounded like proof that a change to the country's foreign policy course is underway. But it is important to point out that Belarus has never had a foreign policy concept before (though it has a national security concept). Thus, if such a document is prepared, it would not replace anything; and in all probability, it would simply reiterate the existing multi-vectored vision in the most ambiguous language possible (as any strict conceptual

wording would impose counterproductive limitations on Minsk's ability to maneuver).

As to the proposed modification of the foreign trade formula, it fairly accurately reflects the current reality on the ground.

Even during the period of the rapprochement with the EU, Minsk was barely able to achieve the 33 percent target and export more to the highly protective EU market. Now that Brussels has introduced sanctions against Belarus and suspended most cooperation programs, the target is simply beyond realistic reach.

The proposal to delete the neutrality pledge clause from the Constitution does carry more symbolic weight, as in recent years Minsk made careful attempts to build on Article 18 when promoting itself as neutral ground for peace talks and as a "situationally neutral" actor in the region. However, in actuality, Belarus has not been neutral since it acceded to the Collective Security Treaty at the end of 1993. Moreover, it has bilateral defense commitments with Russia and has always taken them seriously. Thus, even if this proposal is reflected in a new version of the Constitution, it will not bring much de facto change to Belarus's foreign policy. On the other hand, it will certainly earn Minsk some additional points in Moscow's eyes—clearly an important motivation behind the idea.

How the Belarus Crisis Will Impact Baltic Security³

Yauheni Preiherman,
Director, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations

The Baltic Sea region has always been important for the preservation of peace in Europe. During the Cold War, the iron curtain dividing Europe ran through the region's western part. Then, after tensions were temporarily defused, the line of contact between the often divergent interests of Russia and the West shifted to the eastern part of the Baltic region.

This geographical shift—linked to many countries from the former Soviet bloc joining NATO—is not the only difference between the two eras, however.

Compared with the Cold War period, the role of small states in the Baltic region has grown considerably, giving them new opportunities to influence regional affairs, sometimes defusing tensions, at other times ramping them up.

Raising the stakes

The new role of the small Baltic region states became especially noticeable after 2014, when events in Crimea and Donbas rocked the European security system. Since then, two opposing models of behavior have been in evidence, as demonstrated by Belarus on the one hand, and NATO members Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia on the other.

The NATO countries' course of action has been to increase the stakes by focusing on and often exaggerating the threat posed, in their opinion, by Russia. The theory was put forward that these countries could become Russia's next military target after Ukraine. Any action or statement by Moscow concerning foreign and defense policy was interpreted as nefarious or even downright hostile, and Russia responded in kind.

Take, for example, the reaction of the Baltic states and Poland to the joint Zapad-2017 military exercises conducted by Russia and Belarus. Official comments and leading media outlets in those countries suggested that the Russian troops taking part would either remain on Belarusian territory forever more, or would use the war games as a cover for a full-scale invasion of the Baltics or Ukraine.

These fears turned out to be unfounded, and the Russian troops returned home as planned. But the experience left a bitter taste on both sides, and added to tension in the region.

³ Originally published by Carnegie Moscow Center, 26.01.2021. Also published on the Minsk Dialogue web portal: <https://minskdialogue.by/en/research/opinions/how-the-belarus-crisis-will-impact-baltic-security>

Poland and the Baltic countries chose this approach for both emotional and rational reasons. On an emotional level, the historical narrative of an aggressive Russia that inflicted pain and deprivation on their parents and grandparents forces people in these countries to look at modern Russian policy through the prism of the past.

The rational aspect of this approach is that by sustaining regional tension, the leaders of these countries count on getting an additional guarantee of their security in the form of increasing military aid and the physical presence on their soil of NATO troops.

And indeed, following their 2014 and 2016 summits, NATO members decided to deploy four multinational armed contingents to Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia on a rotating basis to act as a deterrent against Russia in the region.

Minsk, on the other hand, opted to go in a different direction back in 2014. As an ally of Russia both within the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Union State, it took its responsibilities seriously. The Belarusian authorities and society saw an increase in military and political tensions in the region not as an advantage, but as a risk, and so chose the approach of trying to reduce those tensions. Minsk called on the other Baltic region nations to join it in this approach.

The Belarusian attempt

Minsk's logic also has both an emotional and rational foundation. Deeply engrained in Belarusian society is the historical memory of the destruction and enormous loss of life caused by war in the region. Then there is the rational understanding that a further growth in tension between Russia and the West will inevitably turn Belarusian territory into a frontline restricted area, which will only add to the country's security problems and lead to new restrictions on economic cooperation with the EU.

In an attempt to defuse tension in the region, Belarus has tried to be very open on security matters, inviting observers from NATO and most of the Baltic region countries to the Belarusian part of the Zapad-2017 exercises. When the United States withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, the Belarusian leadership announced it was prepared to continue to abide by the treaty, and called on other countries in the region to introduce a moratorium on the production and deployment of corresponding missiles.

Minsk's biggest-scale and most ambitious initiative is Helsinki 2: a plan for a broad dialogue on issues of international security amid derailed strategic stability. These initiatives have elicited interest in Berlin, Paris, and Washington, which would love to see the electrified region as less of a headache.

After the Belarus political crisis

The crisis that has developed in Belarus following the contested August presidential election has complicated the state of affairs in the Baltic region even further. Poland and—in particular—Lithuania have become the European vanguard in the fight against Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. His regime, meanwhile, has accused Vilnius and Warsaw (and with them, all of the EU and NATO) of being behind the protests that have rocked the country since the vote. Several weeks after the election, Lukashenko said he had moved half of the Belarusian army to the border with Poland and Lithuania due to the “increased concentration of NATO troops” on the country’s western borders.

Clearly, there can be no talk of increased trust or security on Minsk’s part in these conditions, and it looks like a line will soon be drawn under Belarus’s initiatives to increase transparency and minimize military risks. In this respect, the Belarusian crisis has undoubtedly significantly worsened security in the Baltic region.

Strategically speaking, however, little has been lost.

Minsk still has an interest in, at the very least, preventing any further escalation of tension in the region, since if the geopolitical confrontation leads to an armed conflict, it’s highly likely to involve Belarusian territory. Ideally, it would still like to find a stable model for regional security that could offset the tense standoff between Russia and NATO.

Russia and the West would also like to avoid an armed conflict in the Baltic region, though they have shown little real readiness to stop the buildup of their confrontation or the militarization of the region.

Of course, there are always unpleasant surprises in international relations, even when they are in nobody’s interests. Either by mistake, or through lack of communications, missiles get fired, planes are shot down, and other military incidents occur. Their consequences are unpredictable, so the main task for the Baltic region as a whole is to avoid such surprises, and not to cross the point of no return and prompt the uncontrolled escalation of the confrontation.

As the situation in Belarus stabilizes—as violence decreases and the spiral of Western sanctions and countersanctions by Minsk comes to an end—it’s important to return to Belarusian initiatives aimed at reducing tension in the region. One example could be finding an opportunity to apply existing bilateral agreements between Minsk and its neighbors on additional confidence-building and security measures in the interests of the Baltic Sea region as a whole.

Dialogue between Belarus and Lithuania: Behind the Red Lines of Good Neighborliness⁴

Sergey Rekada,
Director, Center for the Study of Integration Prospects

Since August 2020 Belarusian-Lithuanian relations have been in crisis, which is long overdue: the crisis in their relations should have started five years earlier. It was inevitable after 2014, and only Minsk's belief in multi-vector foreign policy and neutrality prevented the dialogue degradation between the neighbors. But in 2020, the last chance for dialogue maintenance was lost, as Lithuania's non-recognition of the results of Belarus' presidential election hit the very heart of Belarus-Lithuania relations.

Red lines between Belarus and Lithuania

After the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, good neighborliness between Lithuania and Belarus contradicted the very logic and nature of modern international relations.

Belarus is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, Lithuania is a member of the European Union, and the EU does not recognize the as an actor. Belarus has formed a union with Russia which isn't taken well in Vilnius both officially and publicly, as it was reflected in the statements of the previous president of Lithuania about "the terrorist state". The leadership of this Baltic republic systematically supports the radical pro-European opposition on the territory of Belarus. And long before the Ukrainian crisis, Lithuania has been properly functioning as a "democracy shuttle", brokering funding from the wealthier "big brothers" (the USA, the EU and Sweden) to the Belarusian opposition members. Finally, both countries participate in different military blocs, regularly conducting exercises near each other's borders. Lithuania is a NATO member, and Belarus participates in the CSTO and the Union State, which has an advanced defense dimension.

In short, the two countries are on opposite sides of the geopolitical chasm, which, moreover, began to deepen rapidly after 2014. In spite of this, Belarus conducted a prudent foreign policy and tried to maintain contacts with Vilnius for the sake of its economic interests.

Lithuania is certainly not the main trade and economic partner of Belarus. In 2020, the Baltic republic ranked sixth among Belarus trade partners by goods

⁴ Originally published on the RIAC web portal in Russian, 11.08.2021: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/dialog-belarusi-i-litvy-za-krasnymi-liniyami-dobrososedstva/>

turnover. However, there are some key cooperation elements that are vital for Minsk, such as the transit of potassium fertilizers and oil products (in 2020 the transit amounted to \$397 million out of \$443 million of all services provided to Belarus by Lithuanian companies), and electricity export, which became possible after the closure of the Lithuanian Ignalina nuclear power plant and the launch of the Belarusian nuclear power plant in Ostravets. Minsk has also used the services of European multilateral financial institutions, including the Nordic-Baltic Investment Bank. In addition, Belarus also valued humanitarian contacts with Lithuania, even though they often undermined the Belarusian statehood. The most vivid example is the "runaway" European State University on the territory of Lithuania, which over the years has become a forge for the Belarusian counter-elite.

Before 2020 Belarusian experts repeatedly pointed out in informal conversations that Belarus perfectly understood Lithuania's hostility toward its statehood, but believed that Vilnius has not yet crossed the red lines: yes, it supports the opposition, but it does not organize unrest; yes, it criticizes Belarus for being undemocratic, but it is ready to make money from transit of Belarusian goods. Even though the campaign to discredit the BelNPP project irritated Belarus, it did not make it reconsider its relations with Lithuania: yes, they criticize our project, but they cannot hinder its implementation anyway. And since the harm is only at the level of rhetoric, why escalate tensions and jeopardize quite feasible economic benefits?

No choice after the election

The situation changed dramatically after the 2020 presidential election, as Belarus was in fact left with no choice. Lithuania and other Western countries did not recognize the results of the election, and hence Lithuania denied the legitimacy of Alexander Lukashenko's presidency. Belarus could have been ready to continue turning a blind eye to Lithuania's hostility and accusations of dictatorship, but Lithuania unilaterally broke off contacts with Belarus and also gave asylum to Svetlana Tikhanovskaya on its territory, recognizing her as the legitimate president in exile.

Then the West began to institute a set of sanctions on Belarus. Lithuania, contrary to its national interests, was among the most ardent supporters of such measures to influence Minsk. As a result, by the summer of 2021, the assets of 166 persons and 15 entities have been subject to the EU sanctions. In addition, Belarus is currently subject to sectoral sanctions, which:

- banned import of Belarusian potassium, oil refining and tobacco;
- banned export of equipment, technology or software intended primarily for use in the monitoring or interception of the internet and of telephone communications, and dual-use goods and technologies;
- restricted the access to EU capital markets, including the European Investment Bank;
- restricted the participation of EU banks in the Belarusian state projects;

- prohibited European organizations to use financial instruments, investment services of Belarusbank, Belinvestbank and Belagroprombank.

Belarus' response was rather symbolic for the European Union, but very painful for Lithuania. In March 2021, the president of Belarus signed a decree on counter-sanctions, which imposes a ban on the import of certain categories of goods, works or services from companies of the countries that had previously applied sanctions against Belarusian companies or citizens. At the end of June, a number of diplomatic measures were added to it, as Belarus:

- suspended the participation in the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative;
- suspended the readmission agreement with the EU;
- recalled the Belarusian permanent representative to the European Union and recommended the head of the EU mission to do the same;
- prohibited entry into the country for representatives of European institutions and persons from the European Union who contributed to the imposition of sanctions.

For Lithuania, the reorientation of oil products transit from the Baltic ports to the Russian port of Ust-Luga became the most important element of the counter-sanctions. Belarus exports about 11 million tons of oil products annually, primarily gasoline, diesel fuel, and fuel oil. The United Kingdom, Ukraine, the Netherlands, and Poland are the largest buyers of Belarusian oil products. Also, part of them is exported to Asia, Africa, Latin America and the United States. Until recently, half of the exports went by sea through the ports of the Baltic states. Klaipeda state port of Lithuania accounts for 90% of Belarusian exports of oil products (the remaining volumes are transhipped through Ventspils, Latvia). In 2020, the revenue of the Lithuanian state enterprise Klaipedosnafta from the transshipment of oil products amounted to 31.4 million euros.

Thanks to Russian support, Belarus was able to deprive its hostile neighbor of this revenue without any loss to its own budget. February 19, 2021, Moscow and Minsk signed an intergovernmental agreement on transshipment of Belarusian oil products for export through Russian seaports.

On March 9, 2021, Vitalyi Savelyev, Russian Transport Minister, announced that Belarus had delivered the first shipments of oil products (gasoline and fuel oil) to Russian ports on the Baltic Sea. In three years, Russian ports (primarily Ust-Luga in Leningrad region) will be ready to receive up to 9.8 million tons of Belarusian oil products. The agreement is in force until the end of 2023, with the possibility of automatic extension.

Alexander Novak, Russian Deputy Prime Minister, estimates that the Russian ports can handle from 4 to 6 million tons of Belarusian oil products a year, which means it is technically possible to fully meet Belarusian needs for sea transit of the respective goods. In the course of the year of confrontation with Western countries, Belarus has been progressively minimizing its economic engagement with Lithuania,

which, given the specific nature of Belarusian diplomacy, automatically entails a decrease in political interest in this Baltic republic as well.

Migration crisis and the future of Belarusian–Lithuanian relations

Minsk did not limit its response with economic and political confrontation with Vilnius. The third aim of the Belarusian strike was the security sphere. In May 2021 Alexander Lukashenko stated that thenceforth Western countries would have to control drug trafficking and illegal migration on the border with Belarus on their own. First and foremost, Minsk has ceased to perform these functions on the Lithuanian direction. At the same time, the number of flights to Belarus from the Middle East with refugees on board, intending to enter the territory of the European Union, increased. Only in June, according to the State Border Committee of Belarus, the number of illegal border crossings from Belarus to Lithuania increased sixfold. The result was swift as in early July Vilnius introduced a state of emergency in connection with the migration crisis.

The refugees really hit a sore spot in Lithuania for a number of reasons. First of all, it demonstrated that Vilnius can nominally recognize anyone as the president of Belarus, even Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, but it is necessary to maintain a dialogue with the current official Minsk to solve the existing problems. By breaking off all contacts with Alexander Lukashenko, Vilnius put itself in conditions, when the only effort to settle the migration crisis was an attempt to build a wall and fence off its neighbor, which requires time, money and is hardly implementable in practice. Secondly, the migration crisis has highlighted Lithuania's socio-economic problems. The costs of maintaining a growing number of refugees were put on municipal budgets and the healthcare system, which are already overburdened by the pandemic and lockdowns.

Finally, the refugees from the Middle East have awakened the fears of a monocultural Lithuanian society. With Lithuania experiencing permanent depopulation, the flooding of the country with culturally alien Muslims, which will be difficult to "digest" later on, cannot but cause irritation and increased xenophobia among ordinary citizens. It is not surprising that two months into the migration crisis, both the locals and the newly arrived migrants, dissatisfied with the attitude toward them in the country, organized protests in Lithuanian regions bordering Belarus. The slightest provocation in such conditions can lead to violent clashes between the sides and, indeed, to the need to introduce a state of emergency in the country.

Can the migration crisis, coupled with the economic pressure, change Lithuania's position on Belarus? The acute refugee problem did make some Lithuanian media outlets wonder whether it is worth reconsidering the policy toward Minsk. However, the likelihood that these words will be followed by real action is miniscule. The reason behind this is the international dynamic, largely influencing the Belarus–Lithuania dialogue. Official Vilnius clearly understands its function in the Eastern Europe as the agent of the US interests. Its main purpose in the region is fencing off Russia and the "Eurasian" conglomerate of countries from

the "European" economic and political space. This global political function is superior to national interests. It explains Lithuania's constant attempts, contrary to its own economic interests, to aggravate relations with Russia (which is still its largest trading partner), to block the Russia-Belarus project of the Ostrovets Nuclear Power Plant, to support the opposition in Belarus, etc. Therefore, the existing threats will not alter Lithuania's approach towards Belarus.

Minsk, probably realizing this, is in no hurry to accept apologies from the Baltic neighbor (even if there were such) and has taken a wait-and-see attitude. Belarusian main decisions on relations with Western countries, including Lithuania, are situational as they are aimed at avoiding falling under any of the world centers of power's control. On the one hand, Minsk officially admits the mistake of adopting the multi-vector foreign policy and entering a "thaw" in relations with the West after 2014. Previous partners of Belarus, such as the former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Carpenter, are called anti-Lukashenko conspirators on state television. On the other hand, this does not lead to any fundamental changes in the eastern direction of Belarus foreign policy. Rather, the multi-vector approach is undergoing a transformation from the "West-East" to the "Russia-China" system of coordinates, hoping that the West will eventually realize that pressure on Lukashenko is futile and return to the policy of "engagement". Then, under the conditions of the next "engagement", the revival of Belarusian-Lithuanian relations will become possible.

Belarus' Obligations in the Field of Disarmament and Arms Control⁵

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Relations

Table 1. Treaties in the field of disarmament and arms control to which the Republic of Belarus is a signatory.

Treaty	Year of the Conclusion of a Treaty	Year of the Entry into Force of a Treaty	Year of Belarus' Accession to a Treaty
<i>Disarmament</i>			
The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction	1972	1975	1975
The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction	1993	1997	1993
The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons	1968	1970	1993
The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction	1997	1999	2003
The Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles Treaty	1987	1988	1992
<i>Arms Control</i>			
The Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects	1980	1983	1983
The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe	1990	1992	1992
The OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons	2000	2000	2000
The Treaty on Open Skies	1992	2002	2002
The OSCE Document on Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition	2003	2003	2003
The Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures	2011	2011	2011

⁵ Excerpts from the comment originally published on the Minsk Dialogue web portal, 20.05.2021: <https://minskdialogue.by/research/memorable-notes/obiazatelstva-belarusi-v-sfere-razoruzheniia-i-kontroliia-nad-vooruzheniiami>

Belarus' obligations in the field of disarmament

The Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles Treaty (INF Treaty) was in force between the United States and the Soviet Union and provided for obligations to eliminate certain types of missiles and launchers. Belarus, as one of the successors to the treaty, eliminated 584 short- and intermediate-range missiles and no longer attempted to build such missiles. The treaty is considered to have expired on August 2, 2019, due to the withdrawal of the U.S. and Russia following a series of mutual accusations of violations of the treaty. However, Belarus continues to adhere to its provisions. Moreover, shortly after the collapse of the INF Treaty, Minsk offered to sign a declaration of responsible countries on the non-deployment of intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles in Europe.

Belarus' obligations in the field of arms control

Belarus represents Russia at the meetings of the CFE Treaty Joint Consultative Group, due to the suspension of the Russian participation in the meetings in 2015. At the 1999 OSCE Summit, the Agreement on Adaptation of the CFE Treaty, which introduced the category of national arms quotas, was signed. The agreement was ratified by Belarus in 2000, but did not enter into force due to a failure to ratify by NATO member states.

The Treaty on Open Skies (OST) obliges States to accept and entitles them to conduct a certain number of surveillance flights per year to identify the presence of significant military equipment. Quotas for the flights are determined according to the geographic size of the state. Russia and Belarus had a common quota of 42 flights per year; the same number was granted to the United States. After a series of mutual claims by the U.S. and Russia on the implementation of the OST, Washington withdrew from the Treaty in November 2020, and in January 2021, Moscow began the procedures to withdraw from the treaty. The Belarusian Foreign Ministry stated that the U.S. withdrawal was detrimental to the Euro-Atlantic security architecture and that the problems related to the implementation of the Treaty on Open Skies should be solved through dialogue. Despite the beginning of Russia's withdrawal from the treaty, work within the Belarus-Russia group of states continues within the framework of the Treaty.

The Vienna Document of 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures provides for the exchange of information on:

1. Military forces (military organization and army personnel);
2. The principal weapon and equipment systems and their deployment;
3. The size, structure, training and equipment of the armed forces;
4. Defence policies, doctrines and budgets;
5. Military notification activities.

The document provides for a mechanism for consultations and co-operation in relation to unusual military activities and hazardous incidents of military nature, as well as a mechanism for inspections. Under the Vienna Document, Belarus accepts foreign inspection teams and also sends inspections abroad. Moreover, under Chapter X of the Document on Regional Confidence-Building Measures, Belarus has concluded bilateral treaties with Lithuania, Ukraine, Latvia, and Poland. These

bilateral agreements expand on the commitments assumed under the Vienna Document, including by approving additional inspections and notifications of military activities.

Dialogue Between Government and Society in Belarus: Present-Day Challenges and Development Prospects

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Globalization and integration processes in today's world, information wars, conflict of interests among political actors in the international arena and other economic and socio-political challenges have become a serious reason for governments to step up their efforts to reform their political systems and find new tools to unite their citizens.

The Republic of Belarus has declared 2021 the Year of People's Unity under the sign of solidarity of Belarusians united by unique heritage, history, culture and traditions. Against the backdrop of political events in 2020, the development of this topic should be considered an extremely relevant task for the government.

Unfortunately, the process and consequences of the 2020 election campaign indicated the presence of many flaws in the system of state administration and highlighted contradictions within the Belarusian society. Let us consider the reasons for such public and political processes in the state.

Major challenges

1. The political campaign for the 2020 presidential election in the Republic of Belarus was initially accompanied by strengthening anti-constitutional and violent tendencies of the Belarusian opposition electorate. There are a number of external and internal factors of this process.

The external ones include, above all, economic and political factors, such as negative market conditions and interference of foreign states in the domestic affairs of the state (primarily by means of information war and diplomatic pressure).

The internal ones include social depression, including that caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as substandard work with the electorate on the part of the government bodies and civil society.

One should not ignore the peculiarities of the development of the private sector in Belarus, which has strengthened its positions and accumulated capital during the years of independence. Today, the business community seeks to participate in the transformation of the political sphere of society, influence political decision-making, covering the sphere of its economic interests.

Some researchers note that the private sector, which has accumulated finances, is increasingly seen in the public consciousness as an authority on the issues of progress and development, and sometimes the opinion of private companies plays a prominent role in society.

Thus, the government should think of new formats of interaction with the private sector, perhaps through business associations. It is necessary to create communication opportunities between the government and the business community, to pay special attention to public-private partnership programs, the system of public contracts, to create conditions for the participation of business structures in the political decision-making. A favorable basis for constructive and effective cooperation between the authorities and the business community is necessary, while such conflicts of interest should be avoided and the partnership model of interaction should be followed.

2. When analyzing the "post-election" period of the 2020 electoral campaign, it is safe to say that the latter initially had the nature of targeted and aggressive interference of foreign countries. Large funds were allocated for political and economic interference in the internal processes of the country and for destabilization of the political situation.

The protests were well-organized, systematic and coordinated from abroad, which has clearly shown the hostile attitude of the West towards Belarus and Russia. We can see how the Western leaders are actively trying to influence the internal processes in the Union State. Many states and their leaders, without fully understanding the essence of the processes taking place in Belarus, have supported the radically-minded part of its society, thus "fueling" the processes that lead to a societal split.

When speaking about the Belarusian opposition, one can only say that an adequate domestic opposition (if it is the one) should stand for the development and strengthening of the state. However, the internal opponents of the authorities acted in radical ways, undermining the image of the country in the international arena, thereby harming its economy and society as a whole.

One should add that the massive brainwashing of the public continues to this day. The information struggle is ongoing. Information and disinformation become a serious weapon, depending on who holds the data and for what purpose they are used.

There are many information sources that report primarily destructive information that distorts real facts. News agencies and Telegram channels spread "fake news", create content out of nothing, use negative connotations of any facts (regarding the authorities), constantly changing and assigning the "guilt" in these processes. And, of course, special attention in this struggle is paid to psychological pressure on young people as the most mobile part of society. The organization of the youth protest movement seems to be the most important stage of the attempted coup, because it is young people who start to destabilize the situation.

Today, there is a clear demand for constitutional and political changes in the Belarusian society. It obliges the government and constructive public structures to be more active and look for new forms of work with society. It is not possible to oppose an extraneous ideology that is generously supported with foreign funds resorting to the above-mentioned methods. First and foremost, a dialogue is needed among all participants in the relations between the government and society: public structures representing different opinions, public authorities, and also representatives of business structures. It is important to find common ground and come to solutions that would to a greater or lesser degree suit all sides of society and the state. After all, with all the diversity of ideological views, there are values which should unite all, irrespective of party affiliation and differences in views on the structure of the Belarusian society. These are, above all, the sovereignty of Belarus, its national interests, territorial integrity, and, of course, civil peace and national harmony.

The Belarusian society has already formed an opinion about the necessity of a reasonable reform of the state structure, and the government, timely responding to such a demand, is beginning to carry out activities to transform some systems of the state administration: work is underway on amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, the Law "On Political Parties" is being revised, many dialogue platforms on a wide range of topics are held, etc.

3. As for a specific activity aimed at exploring public opinion about the political beliefs and expectations of the Belarusian citizens, a sociological study was conducted at the request of the "Belaya Rus" Republican Public Association. We present here some of the empirical data which may be especially interesting for studying the full picture of the current state of society and searching for the prospects of state development.

A total of 1,708 respondents took part in the poll. A considerable part of the survey participants were women: 72.0% (1,230 people). Men accounted for 28.0% (478 people).

Age categories of respondents were:

- Under 31 years old - 10.8%;

- 32 to 49 years old - 59.0%;
- 50 years old and over - 30.2%.

Representatives of different social and professional groups took part in the poll: they were employed (96,9%), unemployed (0,2%), entrepreneurs (0,2%), students (0,4%), retired (1,9%), self-employed (0,2%) and housewives (0,2%).

Through elections the suffrage system allows to form a certain type of power organization and ensure public participation in the formation of public offices. The majority of the respondents believe that the majoritarian electoral system is the most preferable for the Republic of Belarus (66.0%). Every fourth respondent (24.3%) is a supporter of the mixed system. The proportional electoral system based on the principle of party representation was considered most effective by 7.3% of the respondents. 2.4% found it difficult to answer the question.

The respondents indicated in their anonymous questionnaires which political mechanisms of citizens' influence on the government they consider the most effective.

Every second respondent (51.2%) considers civil organizations to be the most effective mechanism. Political parties as a mechanism were cited by 40.6% of the respondents and popular movements by 21.0%. A minority of the surveyed named individual and collective appeals (3.9%), protests and strikes (2.9%) and personal meetings and visits (0.1%) as effective mechanisms. 0.9% of the respondents believe that the state cannot be influenced by any mechanisms. 0.5% found it difficult to answer the question. Almost half of the respondents (44.5%) believe that the role of political parties should increase in election campaigns in Belarus. 43.1% found it difficult to answer this question.

In an anonymous questionnaire respondents were asked to name political parties of Belarus with which they are more or less familiar. The rating of political parties is presented below:

- The Communist Party of Belarus - 58.7%;
- The BPF Party - 51,0%;
- The Liberal Democratic Party - 42.6%;
- The Belarusian Green Party - 23.8%;
- The Belarusian Agrarian Party - 23.5%;
- The Party «Belarusian Social Democratic Assembly» - 23.4%;
- The Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Assembly) - 21.2%;
- The Republican Party of Labor and Justice - 20.0%;
- The Belarusian Patriotic Party - 18.7%;
- The United Civic Party - 13.8%;
- The Belarusian Left Party "A Just World" - 9.5%.

As stated above, the forthcoming amendments to the Law "On Political Parties" are also of great importance for the continued consolidation of the Belarusian people. The work on party development has started in the country, and new players who actively declare their intentions have already appeared in the political field. The participants of the poll see the following as the main tasks of the parties being created:

- political enlightenment and education of their members and supporters, educating them in the spirit of preservation of certain values and traditions, development of patriotism and love for the motherland, preservation of the social state - 55.3%;
- elaboration of program guidelines, political line, strategy and tactics of society development - 44,8%
- promotion by citizens of their group demands to the government - 18,9%;
- maximum integration with the Russian Federation - 14,9%;
- fighting for the conquest and use of state power in the interests of the groups that support the party's program - 10.9%.

Respondents also pointed out that parties must support the sovereignty and independence of the state, participate in the normalization of the relations of the Republic of Belarus with the Commonwealth countries and adhere to the line of increasing the status of the mother tongue.

Conclusions

To summarize the brief review of the socio-political situation of the Republic of Belarus during the post-election period (since 2020), it should be emphasized that the period marked a new milestone in Belarusian citizens' political activity. Today, Belarusian society seeks for opportunities to influence the political decision-making process. The government, in its turn, must seek for opportunities to create conditions for its citizens to exercise their political rights.

We should not expect quick results, as dealing with the crisis, finding new ways for dialogue between the government and society will take time, focus, political will, and the desire of the government to listen to the public opinion. Here we should note that the government and civil society of Belarus quickly expressed willingness to go for the rapprochement, manifested in the creation of platforms for dialogue with the involvement of the general public.

Platforms for dialogue are an extremely effective tool for achieving public consensus, allowing the constructive exchange of opinions and raising urgent socially important issues. And it is significant that partnership becomes the key model of interaction between the government and society.

The main idea of the above-said is as follows: the only way to ensure the best interests of citizens is to promote a public discussion by means of government structures and with the help of civil society.

Besides, the results of the conducted analysis allow us to draw some particular conclusions about the prospects of Belarusian development, which are of interest for this research:

1. In order to activate political parties, remove undesirable public tensions, and ensure maximum transparency of the electoral process, it is necessary to transition from a majoritarian electoral system to a mixed electoral system. A mixed electoral system, combining the majoritarian and proportional electoral systems, will reflect a more complete political landscape in the country.

A mixed electoral system will reflect a more complete political landscape in the country (including the political attitudes of society), because in addition to the fact that it is proportional in its basic principle of operation, it also allows each voter to vote for a specific person who will represent them in a parliament.

2. When forming the government of the country, it is important to consider the proposals of the party structures, including in accordance with the representation of political parties.

The party system can work more effectively, developing political initiative, if some of the leadership positions in the regions are made electable.

3. It is necessary to clearly enshrine in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus the notion of marriage between a man and a woman, which will not only preserve the traditions of the Belarusian society, but also help preserve the institution of family, teaching young people to treat the fact of creating and keeping a family, reviving and maintaining its value with responsibility and awareness.

4. Studying the possibility of adopting a "compulsory voting" system could yield some useful results. Such a legislative norm would legally oblige every citizen to vote in elections. Also, there are debates between political experts on the subject of availability to vote "against all".

5. It is necessary to remove the ban for civil servants to be members of a party in the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Public Service".

6. The modern world of information technologies makes its own rules even in the ideological field. Hence, information policy and new approaches to timely, convincing and continuous presentation of information should become an important part of the necessary changes.

7. Ideology should become the core of a sustainable state policy. It should be an ideology that dynamically develops and unites the people. It would probably be advisable to give constitutional status to the Belarusian state ideology and its elements, including: social justice, traditional Belarusian values, national state identity, values of the victory in the Great Patriotic War, patriotism, etc.

A Belarusian ideology should become a foundation, a uniting and creative force, based on traditions, mentality and history of the Belarusian people. Only then will Belarus be able to form an attractive image of the future.

EXPERT REPORT

Russian–Belarusian cooperation: Time for Strategic Decisions⁶

INTRODUCTION

In February – July 2021, a group of well-known Russian and Belarusian specialists held 12 expert online seminars to assess the state and prospects of the Russian–Belarusian relations and the Union State. The project was organized by the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the A.A. Gromyko Association for Foreign Policy Studies with the support of the School of International Relations of the Belarusian State University.

ABSTRACT

1. The world faces a situation of high uncertainty, the development of new long-term cycles of rivalry. The current state of affairs requires states and their alliances to work out long-term development goals and be able to adapt them to changing conditions. The provision of internal stability and sustainability has become the imperative of national development. The Union of Russia and Belarus is able to provide, on a long-term basis, a reliable defense capability, comprehensive technological, food, energy, biological, and information security.

2. Belarus and Russia have mutual obligations as allies, relying on the common idea of the absence of any alternative to the evolutionary path of development, openness to the world experience, unacceptability of the use of force to solve international problems and interference from the outside. Both the objective international realities and domestic socio-economic processes require further deepening of integration between the two countries.

3. Despite all the undeniable achievements in the development of the Union State there are serious shortcomings. Modernization of economic and political institutions is required to improve the sustainability and competitiveness of the Union State, to strengthen Russian–Belarusian ties. The Union State is in dire need of a common industrial strategy and industrial

⁶ Published in Russian by the A.A. Gromyko Association of Foreign Policy Studies on the 10.09.2021: <https://www.gromyko.ru/solutions/analytics/ekspertnyy-doklad-rossiysko-belorusskoe-sotrudnichestvo-vremya-strategicheskikh-resheniy/>

policy. Integration processes between Belarus and Russia are based not only on economic interests; they are intrinsically linked to the security issues, political and humanitarian cooperation.

4. The Union State programs are designed to create the most favorable conditions for the development of the Union State, to increase the well-being of Belarusians and Russians. We consider it extremely important to ensure the adoption of all the Union State programs and relevant intergovernmental agreements by the end of 2021.

5. The success of the constitutional reform in Belarus will contribute to the national dialogue in the Republic, strengthening the integration processes in the post-Soviet space, first of all within the Union State and the Eurasian Economic Union.

6. It is important to significantly increase expert interaction between Russia and Belarus. It is necessary to improve the system of management and development of allied relations with the help of analytics and long-term planning. We propose to create, with the support of the Standing Committee of the Union State and the A. A. Gromyko Association for Foreign Policy Studies, a Russian-Belarusian Expert Dialogue to develop recommendations on key issues of joint development and strategy, using the experience of the High Level Expert Session within the Forum of Regions of 2019–2021. The creation of a Russian-Belarusian Civil Forum could also play an important role. The strategic goal is to build strong ties between Russia and Belarus at all levels.

7. The situation regarding the scientific programs of the Union State is of great concern. It is necessary to significantly raise their status and expand their scope. We appeal to the Council of Ministers of the Union State with the proposal to plan research projects and include their costs in the Union budget as a whole. It is necessary to build up systemic interaction to achieve the strategic goal of creating a deeply integrated research and infrastructure space of the Union State.

8. The issues of joint economic strategy, adaptation of the economies of the two countries to the global energy transition, bilateral economic cooperation, new high-tech solutions in microelectronics, nature-like technologies, robotics, biotechnologies, space research, spatial and infrastructure development, interaction of national innovation systems of Russia and Belarus are gaining special importance.

9. Russia and Belarus are active participants of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The EAEU activities are aimed primarily at achieving economic benefits for the Member States. But it is also a powerful tool to maintain the areal of friendly countries. At the same time, there are significant contradictions in the EAEU regarding cooperation in the sphere of industrial cooperation and cooperation in the agro-industrial complex. Model projects as mechanisms for solving the existing problems could be

developed within the Union State. The powers of the Eurasian Economic Commission should be extended to effectively resolve conflicts and discrepancies between the Member States.

10. The sphere of security plays a huge role in the life and development of Russia and Belarus. Russia guarantees the inviolability of the territory of the Republic of Belarus. Belarus provides Russia with strategic depth to its West. We consider the lack of an approved military doctrine of the Union State to be a big drawback in the cooperation between the two countries. We urge that this doctrine be approved in the near future.

11. The security system in the post-Soviet space is fragmented. Belarus and Russia seek to turn the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) into a guarantor of regional security, territorial integrity, and sovereignty. Doctrinally, the CSTO should be expanded across the whole spectrum of threats, including both Western and Southern directions.

12. In the current foreign policy environment, the multi-vector policy in the sense of equidistance from Russia and the West does not objectively correspond to reality. The principle of "seeking neutrality" comes into contradiction with reality, including Belarus' membership in the CSTO and bilateral Russian-Belarusian commitments in the military sphere. Under the influence of the objective international context, the strengthening of allied relations between Belarus and Russia, all the participants of the integration processes in the post-Soviet space is on the agenda.

The relations of Russia and Belarus with the USA, NATO and the European Union are at the freezing point with a large-scale element of confrontation. It is highly probable that this challenge will persist for a long time. Normalization is possible if the principle of non-interference in internal affairs and respect for national interests is observed. Russia and Belarus are interested in reducing military tension in Europe. In this respect, it is advisable to consider possibilities for joint initiatives to reduce the risks of unintentional military incidents in Europe and to prevent dangerous military activities in the zones of contact between the Union State and NATO.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND RUSSIAN-BELARUSIAN RELATIONS

The August 2020 presidential election in Belarus and the subsequent period was accompanied by widespread protest activity. Opposition sentiments of varying nature reflected a broad public demand for change. At the same time, the majority of citizens did not accept the path of civil confrontation leading to a comprehensive crisis of the state, possibly its split and the emergence of a new conflict hotbed in the center of Europe. The prospects for establishing a new social contract depend on involving the maximum share of the population in a national dialogue on the modernization of life in the country.

Russia firmly adheres to the principle that the Belarusian people must determine their own future. Russia has consistently supported the idea of a constitutional reform in Belarus and opposes attempts to interfere in its internal affairs in order to impose extraneous political patterns and values on Belarusian society.

The All-Belarusian People's Assembly (APM) played its role, stimulating public discussion of the key issues of the country's development. Several priorities were outlined, including family well-being, strong regional power, reliance on the country's scientific and intellectual potential for development, and public administration in the interests of the people.

We note the importance of introducing a provision in the Constitution of Belarus limiting the presidential tenure to two terms. The constitutional reform should reflect the public demand for a combination of change and stability. Only the conditions of a real national dialogue, based on the imperatives of a democratic, legal, social state, political pluralism and separation of powers, will open the way to the formation of a stable party and political system and to the strengthening of the economic position of the country.

The presidential republic remains an effective form of government in Belarus. However, the presidential form of the Republic requires empowerment of the legislative branch at all levels. The idea of introducing an annual report of the government to the parliament on the results of socio-economic development and an annual parliamentary approval of the program of socio-economic development of the country seems promising. It is necessary to develop a system of self-government.

The work of electoral commissions should be open to control by institutions of national and international observers. Election commissions should include representatives of civil society and registered political parties. Maximum transparency and inclusiveness will ensure internal and external legitimacy of political processes in Belarus.

A successful constitutional reform in Belarus will strengthen integration processes in the post-Soviet space, primarily within the framework of the Union State and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Belarus will be able to declare itself as a leading participant in the integration processes. We are talking about the creation of common economic and social, cultural and humanitarian spaces, taking into account the EAEU Treaty and the supremacy of integration law, its direct effect in the context of decisions made by the EAEU court in Minsk. Enshrining such a line in the constitutional law of Belarus will give impetus to corresponding changes in the legislation of other integration partners. Integration undertakings should be attractive

for various categories of the population, especially young people. This also means addressing the systems of values, motivations, and images of the future.

Professional sociological tools, including public and transparent opinion polls, are needed to effectively take into account public opinion on various aspects of the constitutional reform. The public discussion of the constitutional reform will be more inclusive if the subject of such discussion is not only the proposals formulated by the Constitutional commission, but also the proposals made by various political parties within the legal framework of Belarus.

After the new Belarusian Constitution enters into force, the task of paramount importance will be the adoption of relevant legislation and its implementation in law enforcement practice. The complexities of the current constitution-building process dictate the vital need to implement the constitutional provisions as soon as possible after the fundamental law of the country enters into force.

Integration processes between Belarus and Russia cannot reflect the economic agenda only. They are inextricably linked with the issues of security, political and humanitarian interaction. It is important to preserve the state status of the two languages, i.e. Belarusian and Russian.

In the internal development of Russia and Belarus, as well as in their interaction, not only interests, but also values play an equal role, many of which derive from the common Eastern Orthodox, Slavic civilization. Belarus is in the zone of Russia's strategic interests, and Russia is in the zone of Belarus' strategic interests. The civilizational unity of Belarus and Russia is based on the value paradigm. According to the latest research⁷, the values of "human life" and "order" enjoy the greatest support in Russia and Belarus. They lead in all age groups. More and more support is given to the value of freedom, especially among young people. Other most popular values include family, parenthood, and care for children.

Within the framework of further strategic alliance between Russia and Belarus it is necessary to strengthen the values underlying bilateral relations, paying special attention to self-fulfillment of young people. A common challenge for our countries is the development of mechanisms of social

⁷ Sociological survey "Sociocultural portrait of modern Belarusian society" (headed by I.V. Lashuk), Center for Social and Humanitarian Research of the Belarusian State Economic University. The project was commissioned by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies in December 2020. The sample is representative of gender, age, type of settlement, level of education, and region of residence (1,500 respondents).

elevators, the involvement of a new generation of specialists in the daily interaction between Belarus and Russia.

Have Moscow and Minsk Really Made a Breakthrough on Integration?⁸

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Putting too much pressure on Belarus right now could backfire and lead to unforeseen consequences. It would appear that Russia understands that, and is therefore playing the long game on integration.

Moscow and Minsk have finally agreed on twenty-eight “union programs” on integration, after three years of difficult negotiations. The signing of the programs has prompted fresh talk of the erosion of Belarusian sovereignty and its creeping takeover by Russia. Both countries’ leaderships have tried to present the agreements as a breakthrough, but will they really change the course of the two nations’ integration?

There isn’t enough information available right now to be able to draw firm conclusions over precisely what decisions have been made and how they will be put into practice. It’s hard to tell from the published list of areas of integration how detailed the programs are, and what plans and timetables there are for their implementation. It’s likely that more concrete details will become known after the programs are given the final approval of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko in November at the state council of the Union State that the two countries together comprise. Still, the current list does provide some idea of where Russian–Belarusian integration is headed.

Firstly, the programs appear to be a compromise. Looking at the list, it does not look like the Kremlin has taken advantage of its ally’s weakness to push through its own agenda.

The main conflicts in the interests of the countries became clear several years ago, at the very start of the talks. For Moscow, important issues include tax and customs regulation: the ability to track the movement of goods across its territory. For Minsk, the terms of energy cooperation and access to the Russian market are what matters most. And just as Minsk resisted the introduction of a single tax code, Moscow constantly put off moving over to a single oil and gas market.

⁸ Originally published by Carnegie Moscow Center, 17.09.21. Also published on the Minsk Dialogue web portal: <https://minskdialogue.by/research/opinions/28-soiuznykh-programm-pochemu-oni-ne-stali-proryvom-v-integratsii-moskvy-i-minska>

Both of these contentious areas appear in the list of agreed programs, complete with approximate dates, meaning that both sides have agreed to make concessions—though, of course, the timelines for implementing these concessions are entirely provisory, and could well go the same way as many other agreements between Russia and Belarus that never got off the ground.

Secondly, many of the programs look like general framework documents that will still need to be cemented and clarified with additional laws and agreements. The program on bringing monetary policies in line with one another, for example, envisages that the Russian and Belarusian central banks will reach an agreement on the principles and mechanisms for doing so by December 2022. What they will look like is not yet clear.

It's a similar story with the single gas market. Moscow and Minsk have given themselves until December 1, 2023, to sign program addenda determining the principles upon which it will operate and be regulated. Considering the fraught history of the gas conflicts between the two countries, there is little cause for optimism in this regard.

Thirdly, it's worth noting the issues that do not appear in the published list. There is no mention of a single currency, defense policy, state security, or supranational bodies. Political integration is ruled out entirely. In other words, anything that would impact on the foundations of state sovereignty has for now been removed from the equation. And though Lukashenko has said that it was Putin's initiative to abandon the program on political integration, it's obvious that it was the Belarusian side that insisted upon this.

This is all at odds with the popular belief that Lukashenko, weakened by mass protests and his isolation following last summer's contested presidential election, would have to pay for the Kremlin's help by surrendering aspects of Belarusian sovereignty. In their current form, the union programs contain little suggestion of dramatic integration. That means we are either underestimating Minsk's negotiating position, or seeing a fundamental change in Moscow's strategy—or both.

It's likely that its disastrous experience with Ukraine has prompted the Russian leadership to rethink its approach, and to stockpile some strategic patience rather than try to break an obstinate partner by force. Ultimately, Minsk is in such a difficult situation right now that increased integration, including political integration, is only a question of time: something Moscow has plenty more of than Minsk.

On the other hand, procrastination is a tried and tested tactic for Lukashenko that has repeatedly proved effective when drastic changes on the international arena helped the Belarusian leader find new ways to hold on to power and shore up his country's sovereignty. What if this time, for example, the flood of

refugees from Afghanistan forces the EU to reconsider its relationship with Minsk, just as the Ukrainian crisis did back in 2014? Even in an apparently hopeless situation, therefore, Lukashenko will delay any handover of actual sovereignty to Moscow for as long as he possibly can.

In any case, Belarus's geographical location, the structure of its economy, and the nature of its political system are pushing Minsk to diversify its trade flows and foreign relations as far as possible. Crude attempts to force Russian standards and behavior onto the Belarusian side are guaranteed to be met with resistance and antagonism, even amid Minsk's current difficulties.

Finally, some of the formal and symbolic aspects of the much-vaunted meeting between the two leaders confirm that the agreements are not so much of a breakthrough as routine affairs with a spin put on them. What were previously called "integration road maps" are now more modestly referred to as "union programs." In other words, the focus is shifting from closer integration toward the routine functioning of the Union State. This has the additional benefit of not sparking panic or creating unrealistic expectations.

The fact that the programs were agreed on the eve of Russia's parliamentary elections (September 17–19) also suggests an attempt to score a win at home, even if it was pure coincidence.

Still, it says a lot that the two sides agreed the integration documents at the highest level. It attests to the fact that Moscow is still seeking a separate, greater integration with Minsk, beyond membership of the Eurasian Economic Union. And that means Moscow believes it to be particularly important for Russian security, and even to some extent for its state and national identity.

At the same time, the large number of union programs that have been agreed does not change the fact that one fundamental issue of bilateral relations remains unresolved. Given the significance the Kremlin affords its neighbor (or, to be more precise, its territory) in terms of security, Moscow clearly needs its relationship with Minsk to be more than that of just military and political allies. It needs long-term guarantees of geopolitical loyalty.

The best kind of guarantee would be the presence of Russian military and political infrastructure inside Belarus. That is something that will be difficult to obtain under the current Belarusian system, but Russia is unlikely to give up. That means the issue will continue to spark tension and conflict in their bilateral relations.

Minsk's isolation from the West and the transition of power that has already begun there will create a window of opportunity for the Kremlin and the temptation to fundamentally increase its political influence in the neighboring country. But putting too much pressure on Belarus right now could backfire and lead to unforeseen consequences. It would appear that Russia understands that, and is therefore playing the long game on integration, seeing it as a safer option.



Future Topics of the Academic Debates

I would like to announce that the series of International Debates “Dialogue on Urgent Issues” will continue to be convened at MGIMO further into the 2022.

We plan to cover the following topics within our series of events:

- Current dynamics in and around Nagorno-Karabakh;
- Current dynamics in and around Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

As the initiator and coordinator of the project, I am inviting the participants of the first event in the series to become the regular visitors to the MGIMO IIS Debates.

Please, let me know which topics would be of interest to you so that we can cover them in the framework of the forthcoming events. Please, feel free to reach out to me at y.nikitina@inno.mgimo.ru.

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