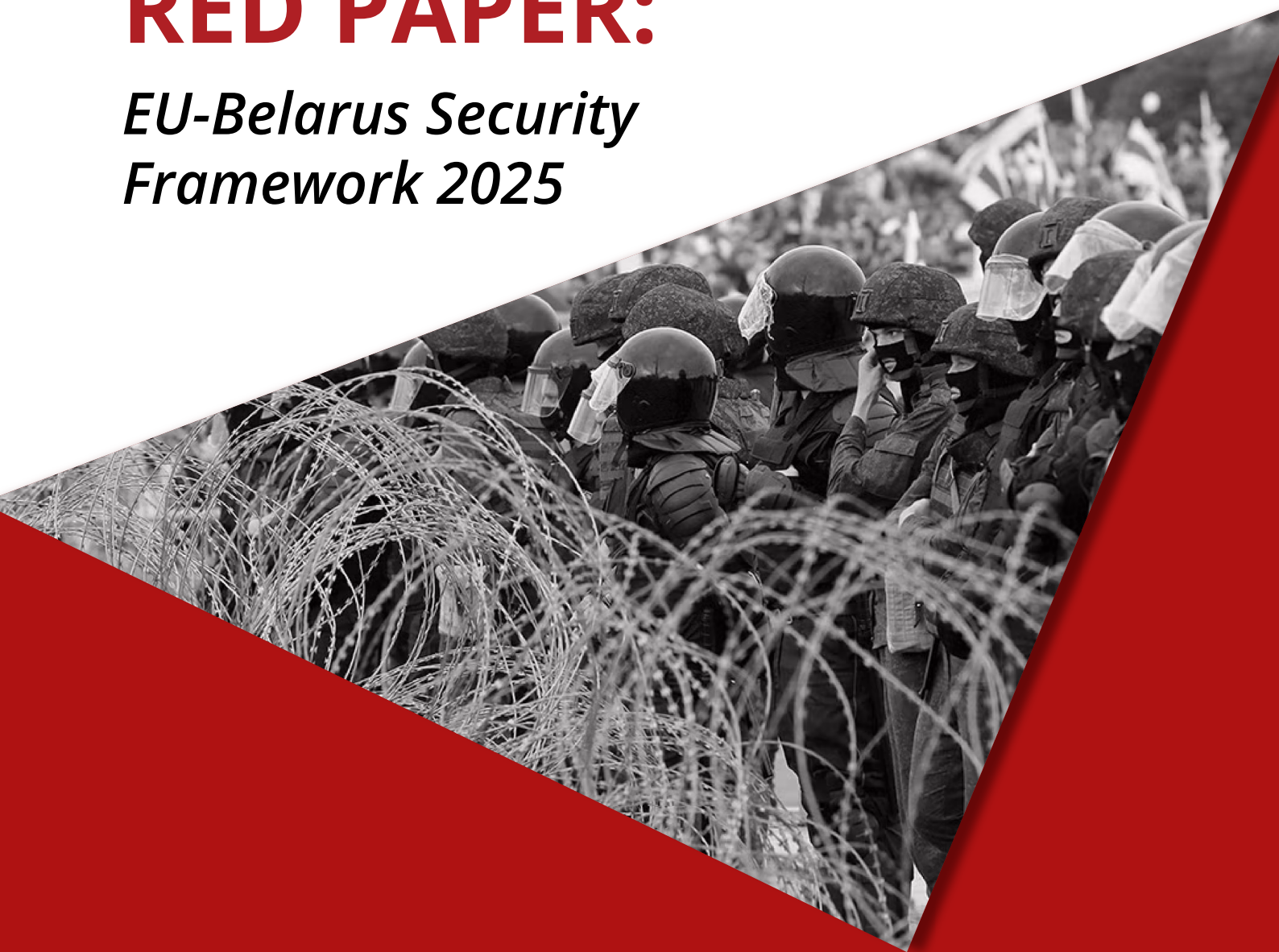




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RED PAPER:

EU-Belarus Security Framework 2025



Energy Security

Information Security

Economic Security

Migration Security

Military Security

Youth Security

Table of Contents

Introduction	3	Recommendations	28
Energy security	4	Migration Security	31
01. General Context	4	01. General Context	31
02. Electricity Sector	5	02. Migration as a Hybrid Threat	31
03. Heat Energy Sector	6	03. Russia's Involvement in the Instrumentalization of Migration	32
04. Biomass	7	04. Humanitarian Risks	33
05. Oil Refining	8	05. Political Destabilization and Polarization in the EU	33
06. Energy Efficiency	8	06. Geopolitical Strategy of Authoritarian Regimes	34
07. Personnel and Community	9	07. Civil Society Mobilization and Support for Belarusian Democracy	36
Risks/Threats	10	Recommendations:	37
Opportunities	10		
Recommendations:	11		
Information Security	12	Military Security	38
01. General Context	12	01. General Context	38
02. The Information Vertical and Its Associated Threats	13	02. Belarus as a Field for Russian Hybrid Attacks	38
03. Political and Doctrinal Foundations	14	03. Belarus as Russia's War Supply Line	38
04. Propaganda Expansion	16	Threats and Risks	40
05. Key Propaganda Narratives	16	Opportunities	41
06. Significance for the European Union	18	Recommendations:	42
Recommendations	19		
Economic Security	22	Youth Security	43
01. Introduction	22	01. General Context	43
02. Macroeconomic Performance	22	02. Repression of Youth	43
03. Financial Stability	23	03. Exodus and Brain Drain	44
04. Production Security	24	04. Ideological Indoctrination	45
05. External Economic Resilience	24	05. Youth as Agents of Democratic Change and Resilience	50
06. Technological and Resource Sustainability	25	06. Why EU Engagement is a Strategic Necessity	52
07. Institutional Integrity	25	Recommendations:	53
08. Threats to Belarus' Economic Security	26		
		Conclusion	56

Introduction

The future of European security cannot be separated from the future of Belarus. Situated on the EU's eastern flank, Belarus has become an increasingly critical node in the region's geopolitical architecture—both as a source of risk and as a potential anchor of stability.

As the Lukashenka regime deepens its political, military, and economic dependence on the Kremlin, Belarus is being transformed into a platform for Russian aggression against Ukraine and neighbouring EU countries. Whether the EU succeeds in securing its eastern frontier depends in large part on whether Belarus can be brought into the orbit of European security cooperation.

The name “Red Paper” underscores the urgency of the situation. Belarus is not only a victim of geopolitical confrontation—it is a frontline state whose trajectory will determine the future balance of power in Europe. Delay or complacency risks allowing further entrenchment of Russian influence in key sectors such as conventional military deployment, energy infrastructure, digital and information space, and migration policy. In this context, the democratic forces of Belarus present a viable alternative: a sovereign, European-oriented Belarus that contributes to, rather than threatens, regional security.

To address these challenges, a comprehensive EU strategy is required—one that combines pressure on the Lukashenka regime with meaningful, long-term engagement and incentives for Belarusian society.

This report outlines strategic recommendations across multiple domains including conventional security, energy security, information security, and societal resilience—especially youth engagement. The central pillar is the geopolitical reorientation of Belarus through its gradual integration into pan-European security, economic, and cultural mechanisms. Doing so would not only deprive Russia of its “strategic balcony” but would also strengthen EU's eastern flank and reduce the scope for hybrid threats.

Finally, the EU must invest in building Belarus' future—from supporting independent media and civil society, to empowering the next generation through cultural and educational exchange. Despite the risks, a united approach by the EU, Ukraine, and Belarusian democratic forces can shift the country from a zone of instability to a pillar of regional security.

Energy security

Belarus remains a blind spot in the EU's energy security landscape. Its full dependence on Russia for electricity, gas, and infrastructure creates vulnerabilities—from opaque nuclear operations to blocked renewable development and systemic integration with Kremlin-controlled networks. This isolation not only enables Russian leverage but also poses environmental and geopolitical risks to neighboring EU states.

A democratic Belarus could be a strategic asset. With strong grid infrastructure, renewable potential, and surplus capacity, Belarus could support Ukraine's energy recovery, export biomass and hydrogen, and strengthen the Baltic energy system. Integrating Belarus into the European energy space would reduce Russian influence and enhance regional resilience.

01. General Context

Since 2021, official statistics in Belarus have been almost entirely unavailable. As a result, when analysing the current state of the Belarusian energy sector, we are limited to using only the data that is publicly accessible at the moment. This may lead to a partial distortion of the actual situation.

The main energy indicators of Belarus, for which data continues to be published regularly, are presented in the table below:

Parameter	Unit	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Energy intensity	Kg c.e/constant mln BLR 2005	365	388,1	364,0378	362,2	355,8
Gross energy consumption	Kt c.e.3	7058,85	40310,52	35958,513	7174,09	37970,74
Electricity consumption	Kg c.e//	38 186	40 548	38 600	41 100	43 000
Natural gas consumption	Mln m ³	18 963	20 059	18 700	17 000	17 200
Electricity generation at NPP	GWh3	41	5780	4683	11732	
Electricity consumption by electric transport	GWh1	11	41	73	01	1
Electricity used for heating	GWh2	73	475	665	9312	73
Crude oil production	Mln t1	710	1 737	1 8101	887	1 938

The main form of final energy consumption in Belarus is heat energy (around 8 million tonnes of oil equivalent). Approximately 4 million tonnes of oil equivalent are consumed in the form of

natural gas, diesel fuel, electricity, and other fossil fuels. The consumption of renewable energy sources amounts to about 1 million tonnes of oil equivalent¹.

1. *Energy Balance of the Republic of Belarus, Belsat, 2021.*

02. Electricity Sector

Current situation

Until 2020, around 55% of electricity in Belarus was generated by combined heat and power plants (CHPPs), about 42% by condensing thermal power plants, and roughly 3% by renewable energy sources.

In 2020, the first unit of the nuclear power plant was launched. It is expected that once operating at full capacity, the NPP will generate around 18 billion kWh, or about 40% of total electricity consumption². However, this mode of operation remains out of reach due to periodic emergency shutdowns and longer-than-expected planned maintenance periods.

Currently, around 35% of electricity is generated by the NPP, which is designed to operate constantly at nominal capacity, and 55% is generated by CHPPs, which operate depending on the demand for heat energy and cannot adjust their capacity freely. About 90% of electricity is produced by power stations that cannot vary their output, which has

led to an oversupply of electricity. This problem is being addressed through the construction of electric boilers and by incentivising electricity use for heating purposes. To support this, a special tariff has been introduced, which covers only about 15%³ of the cost of electricity production.

In this context, the authorities are seriously considering building a second nuclear power plant or adding a third unit to the existing one.

Difficulties in balancing electricity supply and demand significantly limit the potential for variable renewable energy sources (RES), such as solar and wind power. To restrict new RES capacities, Decree No. 357⁴ dated September 24, 2019, "On Renewable Energy Sources," was adopted. It introduced capacity quotas for RES construction. For the period 2021–2025, these quotas were set at zero. For the period 2025–2029, the total quota has been set at 43 MW⁵.



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- ² *The Belarusian NPP has generated over 40 billion kWh of electricity, Ministry of Energy, 2025*
 - ³ *Electricity Tariffs for the Population in Belarus, Myfin.by, 2025.*
 - ⁴ *Presidential Decree of the Republic of Belarus of September 24, 2019 No. 357 "On Renewable Energy Sources"*
 - ⁵ *Belarus Has Set Quotas for New RES Installations for 2025–2029, Belta, 2025.*

Development

The development of the energy sector as a whole is aimed at expanding the use of electricity. This is evident from the Comprehensive Plan for the Development of the Electric Power Sector until 2025⁶, the Program for Increasing Electricity Consumption for Heating Needs⁷, and the efforts to promote the use of electric transport. Overall, this aligns with the EU policy trends toward the electrification of final energy consumption.

However, despite similar trends, the underlying reasons behind these choices differ significantly. In the EU, electrification is pursued to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by replacing fossil fuels with electricity generated from renewable energy sources⁸.

In Belarus, the current trend is driven by an electricity surplus following the launch of the second unit of the nuclear power plant. The country lacks the technical ability to export electricity to any neighboring country except Russia – and exports to Russia are not taking place because electricity prices there are lower than in Belarus. As a result, to balance electricity supply and maintain system reliability, Belarus has had to construct electric boilers to absorb the excess electricity.

Despite this situation, there are plans to build another nuclear power plant or a third unit at the existing one. However, constructing it would be a disaster for the power system unless new demand, largely artificial, is created to absorb the output.

The focus on nuclear energy discourages competition from other energy sources. Currently, there are strict limitations on the construction of new power-generating facilities. From 2021 to 2024, such construction was entirely banned, which sharply contrasts with EU trends.

A similar dynamic is seen in energy system governance. Instead of developing market mechanisms and flexible systems, Belarus is moving toward deeper integration and consolidation. In 2019, the independent system operator RUP “ODU” was closed, and its functions were transferred to the state-owned vertically integrated utility, Belenergo. As a result, even the role of system operator is no longer institutionally separated from other activities. There are no visible signs of reversing this trend or recognition of the negative consequences it may cause.

03. Heat Energy Sector

Current situation

Combined heat and power plants (CHPPs), which produce both electricity and heat, account for approximately 55% of total heat production. The remaining heat is generated by boiler houses operated by public utilities and industrial enterprises.

A significant issue is the subsidization of heat consumption, which reaches up to 80%⁹ of the actual cost of energy for households. These costs are partially covered by the state budget and partially offset by higher tariffs imposed on enterprises.

6. *Decree on the Approval of the Comprehensive Development Plan for the Electric Power Sector until 2025, Considering the Launch of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant, Pravo.by, 2016.*

7. *Belarus Adopts Program to Increase Household Electricity Consumption, Belta, 2021.*

8. *REPowerEU Plan, European Union, 2022.*

9. *“On Amendments to the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of December 30, 2013 No. 1166”*

Development

Heat generation at CHP plants is likely to remain unchanged in the near term, as it is currently the cheapest source of heat energy and enables cross-subsidization between heat and electricity. However, in the longer term and in the context of decarbonization, CHP plants pose a significant challenge for energy systems, as they cannot transition to renewable energy sources.

The unit capacities of such plants are quite high – Minsk CHP-4, for example, has an installed capacity of over 1 GW and is one of the largest in the EU region. Transitioning such large facilities to renewable fuels such as biomass or biogas currently appears unrealistic. Decommissioning them would require not only replacing generation capacity with renewables, but also securing heat production via solar collectors, electric heating, or heat pumps. This would, in turn, necessitate significant upgrades and expansion of the grid infrastructure in cities.

In heat supply from boiler houses, the trend of converting heat sources to biomass appears

to continue, although the pace of replacement has slowed considerably due to restrictions on investments from international financial institutions. However, the economic viability and profitability of such projects still support these efforts. Thus, Belarus' heat energy sector is currently moving in line with European trends toward increased use of biomass, albeit at a much slower pace.

At the same time, biomass development is competing with two other trends:

Continued gasification, as gas equipment remains much more convenient for consumers.

Expansion of peat use. This direction is promoted by the Ministry of Energy, although it is mainly aimed at expanding peat use at large industrial facilities (e.g., cement plants) rather than among the general population. This is primarily due to the inconvenience of using peat as a heating fuel for private homes.

04. Biomass

Current situation

By 2022, a number of international projects had been implemented in Belarus to convert boiler houses to biomass. After 2022, these projects were halted, temporarily suspending the transition to biomass. Additionally, in 2022, sanctions were imposed on Belarusian forest industry products. Until that year, Belarus had been producing around 600 thousand tons of wood pellets annually, almost all of which were exported to the EU.

Currently, various measures are being taken to increase domestic consumption of fuel pellets. A government-funded program is being developed for the construction of pellet-fired boiler houses. Households are being compensated for the purchase of suitable boilers and the acquisition of wood pellets.

Development

In recent years, there has been a noticeable push to stimulate the consumption of **wood pellets**. This trend stems from the significant production capacities that had been commissioned before 2020, originally intended to supply the EU market. However, sanctions on the export of wood products have led to the cessation of pellet exports, and, as a result, mechanisms are now being created to stimulate domestic consumption of wood pellets in Belarus.

Although these support measures are not

sustainable and entail a number of negative side effects, the overall trends in heat supply partly align with those in the EU. That said, the underlying drivers behind these trends are fundamentally different. In the Belarusian context, the promotion of pellet consumption may prove unsustainable due to the high cost of pellets. If the government loses the ability to maintain low, subsidized pellet tariffs, this trend is likely to reverse, resulting in a sharp decline in consumption.

05. Oil Refining

Current situation

Oil refining in Belarus is primarily represented by two oil refineries – the Navapolatsk and Mazyr refineries – which together have a processing capacity of up to 24 million tons of crude oil per year. To meet domestic demand for petroleum products, approximately 8 million tons are refined annually. The surplus is exported.

After the EU banned the purchase of petroleum products from Belarusian refineries and prohibited their transit through EU countries, exports were redirected to Russian ports. This significantly increased export costs and reduced the profitability of oil refining. In 2024, both refineries operated at a loss.

Development

The future of Belarusian oil refineries remains uncertain. Following the loss of access to cheap Russian crude oil, their economic prospects have become unclear. This uncertainty is primarily driven by numerous unknown variables: what conditions will apply to oil transit through EU countries, whether it will be possible to implement the necessary infrastructure projects, such as oil pipelines or port terminals.

There is also high uncertainty regarding markets: will it be possible to find buyers for petroleum products in distant countries if crude oil is purchased at global market prices, especially considering high transportation costs? Relations with Ukraine and the potential resumption of petroleum product exports to its market will also play a key role.

All of this is further complicated by the global decline in demand for petroleum products due to the energy transition and the electrification of transport.

Nevertheless, refinery management is actively trying to mitigate these risks. A modernization program has been completed recently, significantly improving processing efficiency and increasing the output of light petroleum products. The next step in the development of the Mozyr Refinery is the construction of a polypropylene production complex, as part of an effort to move into petrochemicals and secure market positions in anticipation of a shrinking petroleum product market.

06. Energy Efficiency

Current situation

Belarus has a Department for Energy Efficiency, whose main responsibilities include implementing energy efficiency policies and promoting the development of renewable energy sources (RES). Most initiatives for deploying renewables are financed through the “Energy Efficiency” program managed by this department.

However, the mechanisms and tools used to improve energy efficiency are primarily

administrative in nature, lacking broad market-based incentives or grassroots initiatives.

This approach delivered strong results in the 2000s and early 2010s, but since 2015, progress in energy efficiency has largely stagnated. As a result, Belarus currently has an energy efficiency level higher than the global average, yet further improvements have become limited under the existing system.

Development

One of the key reasons for the stagnation in energy efficiency growth is the limited potential for endlessly modernizing existing technologies. Further improvements now depend on structural changes in the economy, as well as the introduction of new technologies in electricity and heat production. However, all of these areas are artificially constrained in Belarus.

Structural transformation of the economy is associated with political concerns, as it relates

to societal groups that were involved in the 2020 protests. Additionally, the expansion of nuclear power instead of renewable energy sources contributes to an increase in the energy intensity of the economy.

As a result, the prospects of reaching global average energy efficiency levels are rather low. It is more likely that in the coming years, energy intensity will remain unchanged.

07. Personnel and Community

Current situation

To fully understand the situation in Belarus' energy sector, it is not enough to analyse only the technical aspects. It is equally important to consider the working conditions.

After the 2020 protests, many people were dismissed from their jobs. In every organization, Telegram channels were created to disseminate state propaganda. Regular meetings are organised with employees featuring representatives from law enforcement agencies (police, prosecutor's office, KGB, etc.) and various ideological officials, during which ideological indoctrination is conducted.

Since 2020, the only remaining option for international cooperation has been engagement with representatives from Russia or other former Soviet countries. Collaboration on international projects with Western countries has become impossible. As a result, local professionals are losing awareness of global energy trends and are becoming increasingly convinced that it is impossible to operate an energy system without oil and gas – in the case of Belarus, without Russian oil and gas.

Development

No steps are being taken to improve qualifications or to create incentives for the most successful and skilled professionals, and there are no signs that such measures will be implemented in the future. The education system as a whole (including the training of energy professionals) is increasingly oriented toward ideological instruction, while less and less attention is paid to the quality of training.

International exchanges and professional competitions are increasingly limited to cooperation with Russian institutions. The situation is further worsened by the disappearance of scientific energy centers in Russia that previously promoted

energy transition and sustainable development, which significantly reduces the chances of such ideas being discussed at joint events.

At the same time, this is one of the few areas where Belarus' democratic forces can still have an influence by creating high-quality technical content, spreading information about the real state of technologies globally, and highlighting the consequences of energy policy decisions. This also includes seminars or educational courses in areas that are currently ignored in Belarusian university programs (such as the functioning of energy markets, for example).

Risks/Threats

The isolated state of Belarus' energy system from all neighbouring countries except Russia also significantly reduces the risks and threats that Belarus may pose to its neighbours.

Among direct energy-related threats, Belarus could potentially disrupt oil transit, but this would also be an unfavourable move for Russia, making such a scenario highly unlikely at this time.

There is no natural gas transit through Belarus except for deliveries to Kaliningrad Oblast. The electricity system is also synchronised only with Russia.

Nevertheless, energy infrastructure in Belarus may pose indirect threats to neighbouring countries. For example, unplanned shutdowns have occurred at the nuclear power plant (NPP). The most recent took place in December 2024, and the authorities did not officially report the shutdown. Information about the outage first appeared in the media. There is a potential risk of radioactive material release into the air or water, and Belarus may not inform neighbouring countries about such incidents.

Work is also beginning on the development of radioactive waste storage facilities. The site has not yet been selected, but if it is located near the

border, it may negatively affect border areas in neighbouring countries.

There could be environmental risks through the pollution of border rivers and lakes, although such cases are unlikely and have no precedent in history.

There is also a risk associated with Belarusian hydropower plants (HPPs), which are located on the Daugava (Western Dvina) and Neman (Nemunas) rivers. Accidents at these facilities could damage the dam and cause flooding in downstream areas, potentially affecting populations in Lithuania and Latvia. However, these plants are relatively new, and major damage would most likely occur only in the event of military conflict. Intentional water releases would primarily harm Belarusian cities and residents.

Among the threats Belarus itself may face, the most significant are potential risks from Russia. Since energy flows between Belarus and the EU are nearly nonexistent, the risks from the EU are minimal. Russia, however, could exert significant influence through price increases for oil and gas or by restricting its supply. In addition, Belarus currently exports oil products via Russian infrastructure, and access to this infrastructure could also be restricted.

Opportunities

When considering the potential benefits the Belarusian energy system could offer to EU countries after a political change, several directions can be highlighted:

Wood Pellet and Biomass Production: Belarus planned to build capacities for producing up to 1 million tons of pellets per year, aiming for exports to the EU. This field could further develop, and Belarus could become a significant supplier of carbon-neutral fuel to EU countries.

Wind and Solar Energy Development: After the lifting of the legislative ban on renewable energy sources, Belarus will actively build solar and wind power stations. With the possibility of trading electricity with neighbouring countries, Belarus could sell green electricity. Given the

overproduction of electricity at the NPPs, this green electricity could be inexpensive.

Hydrogen Production: Part of the overproduction of electricity could be directed toward the production of low-carbon "green" hydrogen, which could then be transported to EU markets via existing gas transport networks.

Capacity Reserves and Cross-Border Power Lines: Belarus has significant reserves of power capacity and cross-border lines with Ukraine. This could allow the use of Belarus' energy capacity to meet electricity demand in Ukraine after the war.

Developed Electricity System: Belarus has a well-developed electrical system with strong connections to all neighbouring countries. The

system is not synchronised with the EU's system, but there are power lines with all countries. Synchronising Belarus' energy system with the EU's system would enhance the reliability of the systems in Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine through expanded cross-border energy transmission and emergency support.

Gas Transport System: Belarus' gas transport system can create additional connections

between Lithuania and Poland and enable direct gas transport between Ukraine and the Baltic countries. Belarus' oil transport system could be used to supply oil to Ukraine via Baltic ports. Free capacities at Belarusian refineries could supply the Ukrainian oil products market after the war ends, and the transit of oil via the Odesa-Brody route, and further via the "Druzhba" pipeline in reverse mode, would offer economic benefits for Ukrainian oil transport companies.

Recommendations:

01

Plan for Integration into the European Energy System.

Factor Belarus into regional energy planning as a potential partner post-transition. Its grid capacity, biomass resources, and surplus generation could bolster EU resilience—especially in supporting Ukraine's energy recovery and reinforcing the Baltic electricity network.

02

Accelerate Legal Preparedness and Market Alignment.

Begin technical consultations on aligning Belarusian energy legislation with EU energy acquis and market design. Develop model laws and phased transition plans in cooperation with Belarusian democratic forces to enable rapid regulatory convergence once political conditions allow.

03

Promote Renewables and Decentralization Readiness.

Prepare a roadmap for post-regime support of renewables, focusing on lifting restrictions on wind and solar, enabling distributed generation, and expanding use of biomass. Technical assistance should prioritize grid flexibility, market incentives, and community-based energy models.

04

Adapt EU Energy Infrastructure for Future Connectivity.

When designing or upgrading EU internal energy infrastructure, anticipate future energy exchanges with Belarus. This includes planning for reverse gas flows, expanded electricity interconnections, and potential oil transit routes—especially between the Baltics and Ukraine.

05

Support Energy Transparency and Professional Capacity.

Invest in countering disinformation by promoting access to independent energy data, analysis, and media. Launch Belarus-focused education initiatives for energy professionals—covering EU regulatory standards, renewables, market economics, and sustainability.

06

Anticipate Emergency Scenarios and Risk Mitigation.

Strengthen EU monitoring of Belarusian nuclear safety, environmental spillover risks, and infrastructure vulnerabilities. Develop contingency plans for potential accidents or disruptions, including coordinated communication protocols with neighboring states.

Information Security

Belarus has emerged as a key platform for hostile information operations targeting the European Union. Under the Lukashenka regime, it has built a centralized system for propaganda, censorship, cyber operations, and narrative control—used both to suppress its own society and to project hybrid threats abroad. These operations often align with Russian objectives but are increasingly autonomous, aimed at destabilizing societies, manipulating migration, and undermining democratic institutions.

For the EU, Belarus represents a distinct and persistent threat vector in the information

domain. Its proximity, strategic alignment with Moscow, and hostility toward democratic values demand tailored responses. Treating Belarus solely through the lens of Russian influence risks overlooking specific patterns of disinformation, transnational repression, and cyber interference. Effective EU strategy must integrate Belarus into its information security architecture and engage Belarusian civil society as a partner in building regional digital resilience.

01. General Context

Since 2020, the Belarusian authorities have systematically reinforced the architecture of information security: new legal acts have been adopted, a centralized management vertical has been established, and the information space has been increasingly aligned with the logic of hybrid confrontation. Domestically, this is manifested in harsh repression; externally – in propaganda attacks on neighboring EU countries, manipulation of migration, pressure on the diaspora, and cross-border destabilization.

The information vertical of the A. Lukashenka regime is not isolated: it operates within a political, technological, and doctrinal alliance with Russia. However, the regime retains autonomy, flexibility, and is gaining experience in its own information operations. For the European Union, Belarusian society, and the diaspora, this represents a persistent yet under-recognized hybrid threat.

The EU's approach to information threats from the Lukashenka regime is vulnerable in two key ways:

1. **Belarus remains a secondary focus** in EU policy documents, often treated merely as an extension of the Russian threat. As a result, the regime's information and cyber operations – and the experience gained from them – are not integrated into the EU's early warning systems or into its legal and platform-based response mechanisms.

2. **The specific nature of the regime is overlooked** – a digital dictatorship dependent on the Kremlin, yet with its own agency. This leads to a lack of precision in EU policy, which often fails to distinguish between the regime, state institutions, and Belarusian society.

Therefore, an effective EU strategy must distinguish:

- **The Lukashenka regime** – the source and organizer of hostile policy.
- **Belarusian state bodies** – controlled by the regime and used as tools to implement its policies.
- **Belarusian society** – under repression and manipulation, including propaganda; a potential ally of the EU in the region.
- **Independent media and civic initiatives in exile** – resilient to propaganda and capable of meaningful partnership.

Failing to recognize these distinctions reduces the political effectiveness of the EU. Pressure ends up being excessive on society and insufficient on the actual source of the threat – the regime and the Kremlin.

02. The Information Vertical and Its Associated Threats

System Structure

Since 2019, the A. Lukashenko regime has been building a centralized architecture of information and ideological policy that combines functions of cybersecurity, ideological control, narrative management, and the dissemination of disinformation. This structure is characterized by its hierarchical complexity and integration into the national security apparatus. By 2025, it can be seen as a coordinated vertical for managing the information space, where each level, from analytical to repressive, possesses its own powers, resources, and decision-making capacity (see Table 1).



Table 1. Key Components of the Structure

Level	Units	Functions
Political strategy	A. Lukashenko (as president). Presidential Press Service. Presidential Administration. State Security Council Secretariat (SSCS).	Defining policy goals and directions. Drafting directives and concepts. Overseeing media policy.
Monitoring and analysis	Information-Analytical Directorate of the SSCS. Belarusian Institute for Strategic Research (BISR). National Press Center. Academy of Public Administration under the aegis of the President.	Media landscape analysis. Threat identification. Methodological support.
Operational control and oversight	Operations and Analysis Center (OAC) – NCOT, beCloud, NCEU. State Security Committee (KGB). Ministry of Internal Affairs. Ministry of Information.	Technical monitoring. Traffic filtering. Blocking.
Execution and dissemination	Agencies: BelTA. Media: National State Television and Radio Company, ONT, STV, Belarus Segodnya Publishing House, etc. New media: Telegram channels, TikTok projects, etc.	Content production and distribution. Narrative adaptation.
Special information and hybrid operations	Ministry of Defense hacker group (UNC1151), cyber-intelligence of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, information warfare units of the Internal Troops.	Cyber operations, disinformation, and media manipulation.

To understand the logic of the information vertical, three key institutions can be identified that illustrate the mechanism and logic of control that flows directly from A. Lukashenka.

01

The Presidential Press Service (headed by N. Eismant).

In addition to its representative role, it plays a crucial part in the operational coordination of media. It serves as a channel for informal directives from A. Lukashenka to state media. It facilitates the manual implementation of information and ideological tasks.

Its key functions are:

- Transmitting personal instructions to editorial offices, hosts, and experts outside official channels.
- Urgent coordination of information narratives in crises.
- Controlling content of broadcasts, selecting speakers, and shaping program structure..

02

The Operations and Analysis Center (OAC).

As the technical and legal core of digital control directly subordinate to A. Lukashenka, it acts as the administrator of Belarus' internet space.

Its key functions are:

- Managing the .by domain and internet operator beCloud.
- Centralized traffic control through the National Traffic Exchange Center (NCOT).
- Blocking websites and throttling internet traffic.
- Certifying cryptographic protection tools.

03

The Belarusian Institute for Strategic Research (BISR).

It acts as an analytical think tank reporting to the Presidential Administration. In information policy, it monitors media trends and develops recommendations for information and ideological strategy.

Its key functions are:

- Providing analytical support to A. Lukashenka, the Presidential Administration, the Security Council, etc.
- Assisting in drafting key strategic documents (e.g., the National Security Concept, Directive No. 12).
- Offering methodological guidance to media, universities, ideological institutions, and heads of state enterprises.
- Supporting IT monitoring systems, including InfoMetrix (for internet media analysis) and MediaMetrix (for television viewership analysis)..

Thus, the information vertical of A. Lukashenka's regime combines institutional centralization and direct subordination with a certain degree of operational autonomy. It is reinforced by a repressive apparatus and IT control, and relies on the capabilities of the security services, ideological enforcement, and constant attention at the highest political level.

03. Political and Doctrinal Foundations

In addition to institutions, the system of information control in Belarus is supported by a detailed political and doctrinal framework, enshrined in national concepts, directives, and military strategy. Since 2019, the regime has shifted from ad hoc responses to long-term policy programming (up to 10 years), in which the regime's interest in controlling interpretations of reality takes precedence over human rights, freedom of expression, national identity, and

international obligations.

The key components of this framework are four official documents: the Doctrine of Information Security of the Republic of Belarus (2019), the National Security Concept of the Republic of Belarus (2024), the Military Doctrine of the Republic of Belarus (2024), and the Directive No. 12 "On Implementing the Foundations of the Ideology of the Belarusian State" (2025).

01

The Concept [Doctrine] of Information Security of the Republic of Belarus (2019).

This document introduced the concept of “information sovereignty” as the “inalienable and exclusive supremacy of the state’s right to independently determine the rules of possession, use and disposal of national information resources, implement an independent external and internal state information policy, [and] form a national information infrastructure¹⁰”. In practice, it laid the foundation for excessive state control over media and information after 2020, including internet monitoring, content blocking and filtering, and the criminalization of participation in independent media projects..

02

Directive No. 12 “On Implementing the Foundations of the Ideology of the Belarusian State” (2025).

This directive enshrines the regime’s ideology as the institutional framework of its repressive policies, establishing the normative basis for censorship, ideological indoctrination, and administrative pressure against pluralism. It mandates the creation of a centralized ideological hierarchy and prescribes unified approaches to ideological work across government agencies, educational institutions, media, the military, and even private enterprises (paragraphs 2.3, 3, 3.1). The directive formalizes the so-called “Foundations of Ideology” as the regime’s core document (paragraph 1), emphasizing support for the “presidential system of governance” and identity based on “traditional moral and spiritual values¹²”.

03

The National Security Concept of the Republic of Belarus (2024).

Approved by the All-Belarusian People’s Assembly (No. 5), this concept institutionalized the ideological framing of threats. It established a principle of symmetry, whereby any external influence – from sanctions to media publications – is treated as inherently hostile and subject to administrative, forceful, or informational countermeasures. It designates as threats: “destructive informational influence on individuals, society, especially youth and state institutions,” “undermining national cultural and spiritual traditions,” and “distortion of historical truth and memory” (paragraphs 28–29). National interests are defined as the “preservation of national identity,” “strengthening of moral and spiritual values of the Belarusian people,” “development of cultural space,” and “protection of historical memory about the heroic past” (paragraphs 8, 15)¹¹.

04

The Military Doctrine of the Republic of Belarus (2024).

Also approved by the All-Belarusian People’s Assembly (No. 5), this document views the information domain as an integral part of national defense and a potential theater of operations. It identifies “information confrontation” as a core element of strategic deterrence (paragraphs 33.5–33.6, 106.5, 106.11). It emphasizes the need to counter destructive psychological influence on the population and state personnel (paragraphs 70.18, 71.14) and affirms the right to use all means, including force, to neutralize threats, including those of an informational and technical nature (paragraphs 60, 61.10).

10. *Paragraph 8. Doctrine of Information Security*, Pravo.by, 2019.
Read in English https://un.mfa.gov.by/docs/doctrine_of_information_security_of_the_republic_of_belarus.pdf

11. *National Security Concept*, Pravo.by, 2024.

12. *Directive of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 12 of April 9, 2025, “On Implementing the Foundations of the Ideology of the Belarusian State”*

In effect, this political and legal foundation establishes a consistent hierarchy:

Ideology and concepts ➔ Normative regulation ➔ Administrative enforcement ➔ Repressive and technical measures.

Based on this framework, amendments were made to the “Law on Mass Media” (2021), granting the Ministry of Information the right to block websites and networks without court approval and to conduct other forms of “rapid response to internal and external information threats¹³.” On this basis, dozens of websites were shut down, and independent media were criminalized¹⁴.

04. Propaganda Expansion

As of 2025, the combined Belarusian budget for information policy and media totals \$66 million, including a separate \$11 million allocated to the Union State media holding, which aims to amplify pro-Russian narratives¹⁵. Projects under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, and the security services are funded through their respective institutional budgets.

replicate Russian narratives, adapt them to the regional context, or develop parallel storylines. It should be noted that despite external similarities, the interests of the Lukashenka regime may differ from those of the Kremlin. While Putin pursues global geopolitical goals, Lukashenka is primarily focused on the regime’s survival. This objective shapes the logic of his communication system.

Belarusian state media and affiliated outlets broadcast coordinated messaging. These often

05. Key Propaganda Narratives

The regime’s propaganda targets both domestic and international audiences, with different goals for each. Domestically, the core goals are to preserve the Lukashenka regime, build loyalty to it and its chosen path, and suppress any alternatives.

Externally, three main objectives can be identified:

01

Undermining the project of a democratic Belarus within the EU, discrediting and intimidating individual figures, communities, and organizations.

02

Aggression against neighboring countries (especially Lithuania and Poland), including provocations intended to create tension between the Belarusian diaspora and host countries, attempts to discredit political elites, and the instrumentalization of history.

03

At the international level, sowing discord among EU and NATO allies, undermining coordinated Western policy toward the regime, and exploiting migration as a political tool.

13. *Draft Law “On Amendments to the Laws on Mass Media”, Council of the Republic, 2021.*

14. *Freedom on the net - Belarus, Freedom House, 2024*

15. 1) *Law of the Republic of Belarus “On the National [Republican] Budget for 2025” No. 48-3 of December 13, 2024. Annex 3 to the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On the National [Republican] Budget for 2025”.*
2) *“Mezentsev: 1 Billion Rubles Allocated for the Union Media Holding”, Soyuz.by, 2025.*

Key narratives of the Belarus regime's propaganda include:

- **Belarus as a besieged fortress:** Framing the West and NATO as aggressive forces plotting the destruction or division of Belarus.
- **NATO, the EU, Poland, and the Baltic States as threats:** Emphasizing perceived threats from neighboring Western countries, especially Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia.
- **NATO is weak, Poland and the Baltics are irrelevant:** Despite contradicting the previous narrative, propaganda regularly stresses NATO's weakness as an alliance and its inability to fulfill its obligations.
- **The opposition as an existential enemy:** Labeling the democratic forces and proponents of change as "extremists," "puppets of the West," or "terrorist organizers."
- **Rewriting World War II history:** Accusing the West and neighboring countries of rehabilitating Nazism and fascism.
- **The West as morally and politically degenerate:** Discrediting Western values and institutions – democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression – by accusing them of hypocrisy and double standards.
- **Russia as the guarantor of sovereignty:** Aligning with Russian ideological lines in the context of the war against Ukraine and justifying Russian aggression.

These narratives are disseminated through state media, Telegram channels, TikTok, bloggers, bots, and the regime's external proxy structures.

At the same time, the free dissemination of social and political information inside the country, which could serve as a buffer against disinformation, has been effectively criminalized and targeted by repression. Common tactics include:

- Labeling content as "extremist";
- Criminalizing the consumption of independent media;
- Mass shutdowns of independent outlets and persecution of journalists;
- Using "information security" as a legal basis for repression.

As a result, state and Russian narratives enjoy unrestricted circulation within Belarusian society, while accessing independent information requires additional effort and comes with serious risks.

In addition to partial geopolitical isolation, this informational isolation greatly increases the risk that the public will adopt a distorted worldview shaped by the regime's narratives. A worrying indicator of this trend is the shift in Belarusian youth (ages 18–24) attitudes over the past year and a half. Trust in state institutions and Lukashenko increased by 16% (from 60% to 76%); orientation toward Russia grew by 13% (from 22% to 35%); and positive assessments of the economic situation rose by 31% (from 21% to 52%).

06. Significance for the European Union

The legal acts and governance practices adopted by the Lukashenka regime are fundamentally incompatible and hostile to the legal, value-based, and institutional framework of the European Union. This is not a matter of political disagreement but a conflict of worldviews: while the European model is built on individual rights, transparency, and freedom of expression, the model in Belarus prioritizes the regime's interests and control over society (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of the EU and the Belarus Regime Approaches to Information Policy

Principle	European Union	Lukashenka regime
Freedom of expression	Presumption of freedom, limited only in exceptional cases (DSA, Art. 11 of the EU Charter).	Presumption of threat: uncontrolled information is seen as inherently destructive (Information Security Concept [Doctrine], Directive No. 12).
Human rights	Individual rights take precedence over state interests (Arts. 1, 6 of the EU Charter).	State primacy: National interests override personal rights (National Security Concept).
Data governance	State transparency; citizens control their data (GDPR).	Centralized control by security services (OAC, KGB); surveillance and blocking without court rulings (Decree No. 60, OAC practices).
Media and pluralism	Pluralism, editorial independence, journalist protection (EDMO, Media Freedom Act).	Unified ideology, media supervision, censorship, criminal liability for "extremism" and "terrorism" (Directive No. 12, Belarusian Criminal Code).
Ideology	Institutional neutrality and value placed on the competition of ideas.	State ideology is mandatory; system of vertical loyalty (Directive No. 12, Ideological Foundations).

Against this backdrop, the regime not only builds a closed, repressive information system domestically, but also projects hybrid threats externally:

- **EU neighboring countries** (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia) are targeted with propaganda and cyber-information campaigns.
- **The Belarusian diaspora** – including EU citizens and residents – is subjected to transnational repression and manipulation.
- **Belarusian youth** face systemic ideological indoctrination aimed at erasing European identity.
- **Trust in the EU** is undermined via disinformation about "European decline," "migration chaos," and "anti-Western conspiracies."

This is accompanied by other hybrid actions, from migration pressure to military rhetoric and cyberattacks. Meanwhile, the EU's response remains fragmented. The Digital Services Act (DSA) provides a framework for regulating online platforms but lacks mechanisms focused on external hybrid threats, especially from secondary actors like Belarus. Article 34 requires assessment of systemic risks, including disinformation and

electoral interference, yet it does not mandate source-specific risk assessment for actors like the Lukashenka regime¹⁶. As a result, regime-led information attacks may go unnoticed, especially if they do not follow the “pro-Russian” pattern. For example, campaigns against the Belarusian diaspora, EU disinformation on TikTok and Telegram, anti-Polish narratives, or interference in Latvian or Polish politics often receive insufficient attention.

EDMO and East StratCom only partially address the Belarusian context. EDMO is primarily focused on EU member states, while regime propaganda remains in a grey zone. EUvsDisinfo regularly publishes reports and debunks narratives, but its monitoring misses many localized stories targeting the diaspora in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and especially Belarus’ internal audience¹⁷. Structures like the Hybrid CoE do not single out Belarus as a distinct subject of analysis¹⁸. Within the EEAS-FIMI system itself, there is still no focus on Belarus-related cases¹⁹. The lack of an information and analytical track leads to the underrepresentation of narratives specific to Minsk and weakens the EU’s capacity for early response.

Despite the interconnectedness of the Eastern European region, **the EU has not developed scenario-based or analytical strategies for Belarus-related crises**, remaining overly focused on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The 2019–2020 tensions between Minsk and Moscow, the 2020 anti-regime protests, the 2021 migration crisis, and the Lukashenka regime’s role in Russia’s aggression against Ukraine caught the EU off guard, leading to delayed, reactive policies and emergency legal measures. There is no “day after” strategy – i.e., no plan in the event of regime collapse, succession crisis, or sudden transformation.

In summary, the EU underestimates the risks posed directly by the Lukashenka regime, including its capacity to influence Moscow’s strategy. Belarus is primarily viewed through the lens of Russian policy, reducing institutional focus. Although the EU **has formally acknowledged the regime’s agency** (e.g., statements by Josep Borrell, the EU Council²⁰), in practice, most tools are tailored to counter Russia, leaving Belarus “bundled” into the Russian problem set.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the European Union should take several steps to more effectively respond to the institutionalized hybrid policy of the Lukashenka regime. Responses should follow two interconnected directions:

1. recognizing the Belarusian factor as distinct within EU institutions and tools, including differentiation from the Russian context and between the regime and Belarusian society;
2. systematic and proactive engagement with Belarusian society, the diaspora, and the democratic forces as full partners in digital resilience. This approach reflects the need for institutional deterrence of the authoritarian regime and strategic solidarity with Belarusian society.

16. *Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (Text with EEA relevance)*

17. *EU vs Disinfo*

18. *Hybrid CoE*

19. *How to detect and analyse identity based disinformation/FIMI, EEAS, 2024.*

20. *Belarus: EU broadens scope for sanctions to tackle hybrid attacks and instrumentalisation of migrants, Council of the EU, 2021.*

01

Recognize Belarus as a distinct actor in the EU's Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) monitoring system. In practice, this means creating a Belarus-specific focus within the work of EEAS StratCom, EDMO, and implementing the Digital Services Act (DSA). In the annual risk assessments by major platforms under Article 34 of the DSA, regulators should require that content originating from the Lukashenka regime be assessed separately (in countries where relevant)²¹. This approach would reflect the actual threat landscape and prevent the regime from hiding in the shadow of the Kremlin.

European External Action Service (EEAS), European Commission's Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT), and EDMO are possible responsible actors.

02

Require large online platforms to report on information activities related to the Lukashenka regime. Under Article 34 of the DSA on systemic risks, the European Commission should require Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs)²² to include in their risk reports a section on operations linked to the regime²³. Platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Telegram should analyze and publicly disclose how their services are used for Lukashenka's disinformation narratives – migration, militarization, and anti-opposition propaganda. These reports, published on the DSA transparency platform, would allow civil society and researchers to monitor the evolution of threats.

DG CONNECT should also develop guidelines for platforms on how to identify and reflect FIMI activity linked to the Lukashenka regime.

03

Create an EU-level interagency platform in cooperation with the democratic forces of Belarus to address hybrid threats originating from the Lukashenka regime. The goal would be regular information exchange and joint countermeasures against specific scenarios: migration provocations, cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and transnational repression. EEAS East StratCom, Hybrid CoE, DG HOME (Migration & Home Affairs), ENISA, Frontex, and the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) could be partners from the EU side.

This initiative would require a decision by the Council of the EU or an agreement between the EEAS and the Commission.

04

Consider legally institutionalizing trust in Belarusian media structures and digital initiatives as strategic communication partners. The EU's digital resilience framework is built on principles of multi-level, decentralized, and trust-based governance (Articles 22, 34, and 40 of the DSA). It emphasizes the role of local, community-verified actors in responding to disinformation and digital harm. Rather than creating yet another context-insensitive entity, it is advisable to recognize independent Belarusian media, digital initiatives, and expert projects as trusted flaggers under Article 22 of the DSA, provided they are independent and experienced in information security. Grant them access to systemic risk assessment procedures and involve them in designing and implementing responses to disinformation and manipulation campaigns by the Lukashenka regime (Articles 34 and 40). In the future, as EU legislation evolves, develop the category of trusted conduits – reliable intermediaries with sustained access to audiences outside the EU. Possible responsible entities include DG CONNECT, EDMO hubs, EED, and EEAS StratCom.

21. *Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (Text with EEA relevance)*

22. *Very Large Online Platforms are the largest online platforms with an audience of over 45 million users in the EU.*

23. *Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (Text with EEA relevance)*

24. *Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (Text with EEA relevance)*

05

Expand support for independent Belarusian media, monitoring, and analytical projects in exile. Establish a dedicated EU grant program for Belarusian initiatives or create a trust fund for Belarus-focused projects. Move beyond the logic of “assistance” to a logic of “partnership and joint response to hybrid threats.” Belarusian think tanks, independent media, digital initiatives, and political structures in exile possess a unique sensitivity to threats and contextual knowledge often lacking in EU institutions, making them essential co-authors of EU strategies.

- Alongside traditional grant procedures, which often exclude new and flexible initiatives, allocate operational funds, and use fast-track pilots for solutions proposed by Belarusian actors.
- Engage with young and digitally native audiences. Launch visual campaigns and strategic storytelling formats for TikTok, Telegram, YouTube, and other mass-consumption platforms, including gaming technologies.
- Support training projects on the DSA and digital rights, helping Belarusian journalists and activists use protection tools under EU law.
- Possible implementing partners include, in addition to the EED, Internews, Free Press Unlimited, Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF), etc.

06

Strengthen the EU’s cultural and informational presence among the Belarusian population, especially targeting youth. Launch targeted broadcasting programs: expand EU-supported content for Belarus, increase Russian- and Belarusian-language output focused on Belarus. Such “soft” measures are vital to maintaining pro-European sentiment, particularly in the face of propaganda portraying the EU as an enemy.

07

Integrate Belarus’ democratic actors and experts into the work of EU monitoring centers (e.g., regional EDMOs) as observers and providers of analysis, especially for identifying and deeply analyzing regime-linked narratives. In addition, it is recommended to grant “vetted researcher” status (including to Belarusian NGOs) for access to data on proxy content distribution, recommendation algorithms, and advertising mechanisms tied to the regime. All of this aligns with the participatory logic of civil society engagement in warning and response systems as outlined in Articles 40–42 and 50 of the DSA²⁴.

08

Launch a regional platform under the Eastern Partnership on the negative influence of the Lukashenka regime. The platform could provide citizens with tools and training on identifying the regime’s disinformation, improving cyber hygiene, and using VPNs and encryption to bypass censorship. Coordination could be handled by Hybrid CoE or an Eastern European EDMO hub, with involvement from exiled Belarusian experts. The platform would target not only Belarus but also neighboring countries with large Belarusian diasporas (Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova). The efforts could focus on developing the population’s “digital immunity” to the regime’s propaganda, including through the Eastern Partnership lens.

Economic Security

01. Introduction

Belarus' economic security is a matter of strategic importance for the European Union. A stable, sovereign, and economically resilient Belarus would contribute to regional security, reduce the EU's eastern vulnerabilities, and offer new opportunities for trade, investment, and energy cooperation.

Conversely, Belarus' growing dependence on Russia, deteriorating institutions, and exposure to external shocks create risks that can spill over into the EU—through migration, sanctions circumvention, regional destabilization, or economic volatility in neighboring member states. For the EU, strengthening Belarus' economic security is a long-term investment in a more secure and integrated Eastern Europe. This means supporting a future-oriented vision rooted in diversification, market reform, institutional

integrity, and global connectivity.

While today's political reality limits engagement, the EU has a vested interest in shaping the economic foundations of a democratic Belarus—one that can withstand external coercion, rejoin global markets, and become a constructive economic partner aligned with European values and standards.

To assess Belarus's economic security, we use a six-pillar framework that captures the country's ability to withstand shocks, avoid coercive dependencies, and sustain essential economic functions. These pillars—macroeconomic performance, financial stability, production capacity, external resilience, social inclusion, and institutional integrity—reflect the core vulnerabilities of a politically isolated and economically dependent state.

02. Macroeconomic Performance

Macroeconomic performance constitutes the most integral indicator of Belarus' economic security – and also its most fragile pillar. The country's average real GDP growth over the past decade has hovered around 0.6%, placing it among the lowest in the post-Soviet space. Even before the political crisis and the imposition of international sanctions in 2020–2022, Belarus had already exhausted the growth model based on state-controlled expansion, preferential energy prices from Russia, and administrative redistribution.

Analytical assessments indicate that the underlying potential growth rate of Belarus was no more than 1.5–2% even under pre-crisis conditions. Since 2022, this potential has further deteriorated due to:

- Severed access to Western markets and technologies;
- A pivot toward lower-productivity integration with the Russian economy;
- Supply chain disruptions;
- Shrinking FDI inflows and foreign credit;

- Worsening demographic trends, including a large-scale emigration wave since 2022 – estimated at over 300,000 people – exacerbating labor shortages and weakening the country's human capital base.

Belarus' macroeconomic institutions remain weak and reactive, with fiscal and monetary policies shaped by political imperatives rather than stability or counter-cyclicality. Although core inflation has been partially restrained by administrative controls, price growth remains structurally higher than in neighboring CEE countries due to fragile monetary credibility, and limited independence of the National Bank of Belarus.

Furthermore, Belarus' exposure to energy and raw material price fluctuations – amplified by the dominance of Russian supply – adds another layer of macroeconomic vulnerability. Energy subsidies from Russia, while temporarily beneficial, embed asymmetric dependencies and discourage structural reforms aimed at energy diversification and efficiency.

The fiscal position is obscured by quasi-fiscal operations: directed lending to state enterprises, implicit subsidies, and hidden liabilities. While reported public debt levels remain below 40% of GDP, the country is in technical default on its Eurobond obligations and has unilaterally suspended debt service to most Western creditors. Debt statistics do not reflect Russia's extensive de facto financing, including energy subsidies, reverse excise flows, and bilateral loans.

Indicators of investment activity and reserves reinforce the picture of weakness. Gross fixed

capital formation has been chronically low (during the last decade) and inefficiently allocated, while international reserves cover only around two months of imports and are increasingly tied up in illiquid or politically conditioned assets.

Belarus' macroeconomic outlook is extremely weak. Its growth potential is structurally constrained and insufficient to support convergence with neighboring EU economies. The country faces a high risk of macroeconomic instability, including recessions, inflation surges, and financial turbulence.

03. Financial Stability

Belarus' financial system is characterized by low depth and limited capacity to transform savings into productive investment. Key features include:

- A high degree of state ownership in the banking sector;
- The overall depth of the financial system is significantly lower than in neighboring EU countries and regional peers. For example, domestic credit to the private sector remains below 30% of GDP (compared to 50–60% in neighboring EU countries), while market capitalization and non-bank financial instruments are virtually negligible, whereas in regional peers these segments contribute significantly to financial intermediation;
- A marginal role for capital markets and non-bank financial institutions;
- Persistently high dollarization of household deposits (though recently declining due to administrative currency restrictions and shifts to cash holdings outside the banking system);
- Fragile liquidity conditions and severely limited access to international capital markets.

Sanctions have also triggered a new array of challenges for the financial system, ranging from reputational risk to blocked transactions and reduced correspondent networks. Some systemic banks have been disconnected from SWIFT. The sector has increasingly relied on Russia's financial infrastructure, notably the SPFS (System for Transfer of Financial Messages), which reduces flexibility and increases exposure to a single external actor. Belarus has also defaulted on its sovereign Eurobonds, having unilaterally halted payments to Western creditors in response to sanctions and legal constraints. This move has significantly damaged the country's financial reputation, cut off external borrowing options, and further constrained its access to international capital markets.

Belarus' financial security is undermined by shallow financial intermediation, weak institutional foundations, limited access to capital, and growing reliance on Russia. The system lacks the resilience to absorb shocks or support long-term transformation.



04. Production Security

The country's industrial base remains vulnerable to structural shocks. Under the pressure of sanctions and reduced access to Western technology and markets, Belarus' production chains have undergone forced reorientation. Key trends include:

- Concentration of production and exports in low-complexity sectors with limited value-added;
- Decline in the share of complex goods from 12.2% to 6.4% between 2000 and 2021;
- Reduction in the connectivity of revealed comparative advantage (RCA) goods, constraining potential for technological upgrading;
- Deterioration in Belarus' economic complexity: it ranks 33rd in CEE on trade-based Economic Complexity Index (ECI), and much lower on technological and research ECI (65th and 119th, respectively);
- High geographic and industrial concentration of production in a limited number of clusters, which increases vulnerability to localized disruptions and limits spatial economic diversification.

The dominant industrial sectors – machinery, chemicals, petrochemicals, and food processing – survive primarily through state support and exports to a shrinking pool of partners, mostly Russia. The contraction of external markets and lack of access to advanced technologies make these sectors increasingly uncompetitive.

Moreover, Belarus' production system has become heavily dependent on Russia for critical inputs, spare parts, and technology. The share of imported intermediate goods originating from Russia has grown substantially in recent years, deepening technological path dependence and reducing the potential for strategic diversification. This reliance poses structural risks, particularly in the context of Russia's own economic constraints and geopolitical volatility.

Thus, Belarus' production security is at risk. The country is stuck in a trap of low complexity, narrow export niches, and dependence on a single market. Its industrial structure lacks adaptability and resilience in the face of global transformation.

05. External Economic Resilience

Belarus' external economic resilience is severely compromised by its overwhelming dependence on Russia and poor diversification of trade and financial flows. This vulnerability is rooted not only in current geopolitical alignments but in longstanding structural weaknesses that limit the country's ability to absorb external shocks.

In particular, the limited geographical and product diversification of Belarus' external trade magnifies its exposure to external turbulence. Belarus' external economic position is heavily imbalanced and marked by extreme geographic concentration. More than 60% of Belarusian exports are directed to Russia, with imports similarly dominated by Russian energy, raw materials, and intermediate goods. The country has lost a sensitive part of its access to Western markets due to sanctions, eroding trade diversification.

The concentration of exports in a narrow range of

low-value-added goods, often reliant on Russian demand or logistics, means that any disruption in Russian economic activity or policy shifts immediately reverberates throughout Belarus' economy. Similarly, the structure of import flows – with overdependence on Russian energy and intermediate goods – constrains the country's ability to pivot or substitute quickly in response to external shocks. These patterns have deepened in recent years. Russia's share in Belarusian exports and imports has reached unprecedented levels, driven both by political alignment and by forced reorientation due to Western sanctions. Alternative markets have not provided sufficient compensation, as logistical, institutional, and regulatory barriers remain unresolved.

This dependency is further intensified by Belarus' growing logistical reliance on Russia. The export of key strategic goods – such as potash fertilizers and petroleum products – now depends heavily

on Russian port infrastructure and rail systems. Following the closure of access to Baltic and European logistics routes, Belarus has rerouted its exports through Russia, making it increasingly vulnerable to Russian pricing, capacity constraints, and political leverage.

From a systemic standpoint, this extreme dependency diminishes Belarus' external shock resilience – a core component of macroeconomic stability. The lack of diversified trade links, limited use of alternative financial instruments and currencies, and reliance on Russian infrastructure (e.g., banking, customs, transport) all compound the risk of external transmission of volatility. This dependency undermines the country's economic sovereignty. The trade structure has regressed

toward simple, low-margin products. Transit routes have been disrupted, with critical losses in port access and logistical corridors.

Alternative trade partnerships – such as with China, Turkey, or other non-Western economies – remain weak and opportunistic. Moreover, settlement mechanisms for foreign trade are constrained by financial sanctions and the necessity of using non-convertible currencies in bilateral arrangements with Russia.

Belarus lacks independent platforms for export credit insurance, trade finance, and transport coordination. In short, it operates as an economic satellite, with minimal strategic flexibility.

06. Technological and Resource Sustainability

Technological development in Belarus is stagnating. R&D spending as a share of GDP has been declining steadily, and the innovation system is bureaucratized and underfunded. Collaboration with global research centers has largely ceased.

Import substitution efforts have had limited success, often relying on outdated technologies or redirection to Russian suppliers. The digital economy remains underdeveloped outside the IT enclave, which itself has seen outmigration of talent and capital.

The energy sector is vulnerable due to its dependence on Russian hydrocarbons. Despite

the completion of the Astravets nuclear power plant, diversification of energy sources remains minimal. Energy intensity of GDP is high compared to peers, reflecting inefficiencies in industrial and residential consumption.

Natural resource governance is opaque, and environmental sustainability is a marginal concern in policy planning. Belarus lacks robust institutions for managing climate risks, green transition, or sustainable agriculture.

07. Institutional Integrity

The institutional environment in Belarus is characterized by authoritarian control, deep politicization, and systemic erosion of governance quality. The regime exercises central control over all key branches of government, eliminating meaningful separation of powers and weakening all mechanisms of accountability.

Macroeconomic governance institutions operate without functional autonomy. The Ministry of Finance, the National Bank, and other regulatory bodies follow political instructions that often contradict economic logic. Budget planning,

monetary policy, and public investment decisions are subordinated to short-term regime priorities, undermining their effectiveness and credibility. Legal and regulatory frameworks are unstable and subject to arbitrary reinterpretation. Rule of law is subordinated to executive discretion, with court decisions frequently reflecting political considerations rather than legal merit. This undermines both investor protection and the predictability of the business environment.

Corruption and informal networks have substituted formal procedures, especially in areas involving

public procurement, large infrastructure projects, and state-owned enterprise management. Decision-making is increasingly opaque and concentrated in the presidential administration, circumventing institutional checks.

Institutional degradation has become self-reinforcing: weak performance justifies further administrative centralization, which in turn reduces competence and increases volatility. The erosion of public administration quality manifests in erratic

enforcement, limited responsiveness, and growing bureaucratic inertia. The absence of participatory governance and checks and balances erodes both trust and adaptive capacity. The regime's priorities override economic rationality, limiting the ability of the institutional system to respond to shocks or support long-term development.

Together, these factors make institutional integrity one of the most deeply eroded dimensions of economic security in Belarus.

08. Threats to Belarus' Economic Security

Belarus' economic security is currently exposed to a range of acute and systemic threats that stem from both internal fragilities and external geopolitical dynamics. These threats are multidimensional – strategic, institutional, and structural – and together form a self-reinforcing cycle of economic stagnation and vulnerability.

Strategic Overdependence on Russia

Russia has also intensified efforts to formalize this dependency through the framework of the so-called Union State. Ostensibly presented as a bilateral integration process, the Union State arrangement serves as a tool for Moscow to promote its strategic agenda. Mechanisms within this framework – such as tax harmonization, customs alignment, and energy pricing coordination – are increasingly shaped by Russian priorities and used to limit Belarus' economic policy autonomy and sovereignty.

The Belarus regime, in turn, has aligned itself more closely with Russia out of political necessity. Following the 2020 political crisis and international isolation, survival – not economic modernization – became the regime's primary concern. Initially, greater dependence on Russia was viewed as the lesser evil; however, in recent years, the regime has increasingly sought this alignment as a perceived source of growth stimulus. It now anticipates economic benefits from integration, despite growing evidence of strategic vulnerability.

Disconnection from the Global Economy

This detachment has also led to a collapse of modernization incentives. With the economy shielded from external competition and deprived

of exposure to global best practices, the pressure to reform, innovate, and upgrade has diminished significantly. Administrative control and survival logic have replaced market-based modernization, further entrenching outdated production models.

As sanctions become prolonged, a sanctions lock-in effect emerges. Belarus risks adapting structurally to isolation – diverting trade, finance, and technological flows toward less advanced partners and creating new economic routines that normalize autarky and institutional stagnation. This path dependency reduces the likelihood of re-engagement and reforms even under changed political conditions.

In parallel, technological and regulatory backwardness has deepened. Belarus is increasingly aligned with standards and systems prevalent in Russia and other low-innovation environments, undermining interoperability, product competitiveness, and digital integration with global ecosystems.

Thus, isolation constrains the economy's growth ceiling and increases its exposure to negative selection in standards, partners, and investments. The long-term costs include technology degradation, brain drain, and chronic productivity stagnation.

External Shocks

Belarus' economic system is acutely vulnerable to a wide range of external shocks due to its structural fragility and internal instability. The country lacks sufficient buffers – fiscal, monetary, or institutional – to mitigate the impact of disruptions originating abroad.

This internal fragility means that virtually any external shock – whether economic or political – can have disproportionately damaging effects. Economic shocks such as fluctuations in energy prices, global inflationary surges, trade interruptions, or a slowdown in global growth (particularly in Russia) quickly translate into fiscal stress, inflation, or output contraction. The absence of diversified trade and financial channels, coupled with weak domestic demand, exacerbates the effect of such shocks.

Political shocks are equally significant. The eventual outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian war, regardless of direction, is likely to trigger a reevaluation of Belarus' strategic position and could upend the current economic equilibrium. Sanctions, changing regional security alignments, or shifts in Russian policy may all create new pressures that Belarus is ill-prepared to absorb.

External volatility – particularly linked to the Russian-Ukrainian war and broader East-West tensions – has significantly increased the country's exposure and reduced its capacity for autonomous policy responses.

Human Capital Erosion and Institutional Decline

Belarus' economic security is increasingly undermined by the dual erosion of human capital and institutional capacity. The country has experienced a significant outflow of talent due to political repression, deteriorating economic prospects, and limited career development opportunities. This brain drain has weakened the innovation ecosystem, reduced labor productivity, and eroded the quality of human capital across sectors.

At the same time, there has been a collapse of institutional memory and technical expertise within state institutions. The purging or departure of experienced professionals from the public sector, academia, banking, and policy-making bodies has led to a governance void. In many cases, critical decision-making functions are now handled by inexperienced or politically loyal individuals with limited technical competence.

This dual erosion – of talent and institutional depth – reduces the system's adaptive capacity, heightens risks of crisis mismanagement, and

discourages investment. It also exacerbates the risk of falling into a low-growth equilibrium sustained by administrative coercion rather than economic logic.

Structural Legacy and Internal Constraints

Before the post-2020 realignment with Russia, Belarus' growth potential was already constrained by the regime's desire to preserve the existing economic structure. The state-dominated model was maintained not for reasons of efficiency or modernization, but because it enabled political and administrative control over the economy. This "control logic" shaped labor market rigidity, SOE dominance, credit allocation patterns, and barriers to private sector development.

The result has been persistent underperformance: low productivity, constrained innovation, and systemic inefficiencies. Even in periods of macroeconomic stability, the economy failed to transition to higher-value-added activities or modernize its institutional framework.

Reinforcing Cycle of Authoritarian Interdependence

The objective constraints on Belarus' economic security are largely rooted in the political preferences of both the Belarusian and Russian regimes. The authoritarian nature of governance in both countries privileges short-term stability and regime preservation over reform, competition, or institutional modernization.

In recent years, Belarus' international isolation has further cemented this logic. The economic fallout from this isolation – including loss of access to Western finance, markets, and institutions – has pushed Belarus into deeper reliance on Russian subsidies and coordination mechanisms. This creates a vicious cycle: the more Belarus depends on Russia to sustain its economy, the less room it has to pursue diversification or institutional improvements.

The actors creating these threats – primarily the Russia and Belarus regimes – do not pursue economic harm as a goal in itself. However, their geopolitical strategies and authoritarian incentives produce outcomes that undermine economic security:

01

Russia:

Seeks geopolitical control and loyalty from Belarus; offers short-term economic support in exchange for strategic alignment; disincentivizes diversification.

02

Belarus regime:

Prioritizes regime survival and administrative control over modernization; views economic integration with Russia as a necessary and potentially beneficial compromise.

03

External actors:

Western sanctions aim to pressure political change but also unintentionally deepen Belarus' dependence on Russia.

Several objective factors reinforce the persistence of these threats:

- Lack of institutional autonomy and rule of law;
- Absence of policy continuity or credible reform commitments;
- External sanctions and exclusion from Western institutions;
- Asymmetric economic size and structure in relation to Russia;
- Brain drain, emigration, and demographic decline;
- Weak private sector and limited access to global capital and technology.
- Without a fundamental political and institutional shift – including democratization and diversification of foreign policy – these factors will continue to limit Belarus' ability to restore economic sovereignty and resilience.

Recommendations

Overcoming Belarus' entrenched economic vulnerabilities and restoring the foundations of economic security will require long-term structural and institutional transformation. Given the current political realities, such change is not immediately feasible. However, a strategic agenda can be formulated now – both to mitigate risks under current conditions and to prepare for a future transition to a more open and resilient economic model.

Democratic Forces: Laying the Groundwork for Future Resilience

Building proto-institutions to support future reconstruction: Democratic forces should focus on establishing proto-institutions that can serve as the foundational pillars of a post-authoritarian economic system. These include initiatives to support Belarusian human capital – such as educational, cultural, and entrepreneurial platforms – as well as emerging business communities and civil society coalitions. Developing professional associations, alternative policy think tanks, diaspora cooperation platforms, and early-stage financial support mechanisms for reform-minded professionals and entrepreneurs can help preserve and nurture Belarus' capacity for future self-governance and economic revitalization.

While the democratic forces lack formal institutional control, they can contribute significantly to strengthening Belarus' economic

security through advocacy, agenda-setting, and preparation for a political transition. Key areas of focus include:

Articulating a credible vision for post-authoritarian economic recovery: This includes outlining realistic scenarios for macroeconomic stabilization, reintegration into global markets, and governance reform.

Building coalitions with experts, civil society, and business diaspora: Leveraging external knowledge networks and professional communities to maintain institutional memory and develop reform capacity.

Promoting transparency and anti-corruption standards: Even in exile, democratic actors can support the dissemination of modern governance

norms and expose corruption within the current regime.

Documenting damage and economic losses: This will be crucial for future claims, compensation mechanisms, and transitional justice.

Strengthening communication with international financial institutions and donors:

Positioning themselves as credible interlocutors for post-transition assistance.

Crucially, the democratic forces should emphasize the interdependence between political transformation and sustainable economic recovery. Without political change, meaningful progress on economic security will remain unattainable.

European Union: Calibrated Support for Long-Term Stability

The role of the European Union is pivotal in both limiting the deepening of Belarus' current vulnerabilities and enabling future recovery. Strategic engagement should focus on two parallel tracks:

1. Mitigation of current risks:

Actively resisting their irreversible integration of Belarus into Russia's geopolitical and economic orbit: The international community should develop and support initiatives that not only limit but actively counteract the structural absorption of Belarus into Russia, particularly in economic infrastructure, legal harmonization, and strategic assets. This is essential because Russia is effectively drawing Belarus' economic and human capital into its own orbit – resources that could otherwise be leveraged for democratic and development-oriented purposes. If this process is left unchallenged, the consequences will extend beyond Belarus. The country will suffer from underutilization of its economic potential and degradation of human capital, while Western nations may face a future where this potential – albeit weakened – is used against them within a hostile geopolitical framework.

Supporting the development of proto-institutions in the economic domain: This includes backing initiatives that help lay the groundwork for Belarus' future economic reconstruction. Examples include independent platforms for business support, diaspora-led innovation hubs, and sector-specific advisory bodies. These proto-institutions can serve as incubators for economic policy expertise and operational capacity during the transition.

Monitoring and documenting institutional erosion: European organizations, think tanks, and multilateral bodies can track regressions

in governance, transparency, and human rights, contributing to accountability and future reform design.

Maintaining links with Belarusian society: Supporting educational, research, and professional exchange programs helps prevent complete societal isolation and fosters long-term reintegration capacity.

2. Preparation for democratic transition

Visualizing integration with international alliances, particularly the EU: International partners should provide clear and credible commitments that a democratic Belarus has a realistic and attainable path toward integration with the European Union and other international alliances. This includes outlining prospective frameworks for association, economic cooperation, and institutional alignment. Such a strategic vision would not only strengthen reform incentives within Belarusian society but also counteract the perception of irreversible orientation toward Russia.

Ensure preferential market access and investment insurance for a future democratic Belarus to facilitate rapid reintegration with the global economy.

Provide technical assistance for macroeconomic stabilization, fiscal reform, and institution-building once a transition is underway.

Mobilize a multilateral support framework involving IFIs, the EU, and other partners to design a recovery program similar to post-communist transformation packages.

Importantly, the European Union must strike

a balance between maintaining pressure on the authoritarian regime and avoiding steps that permanently anchor Belarus within Russia's geopolitical orbit. The deeper Belarus' integration into Russian systems today, the harder it will be to restore sovereignty and economic viability tomorrow.

Joint Agenda for Economic Reintegration and Reform

Belarus' path to economic security ultimately depends on democratization and a fundamental redirection of its political economy. However, preparatory steps can and must begin now. Democratic forces and the European Union should coordinate around a joint agenda with the following elements:

Maintaining a future-oriented economic vision rooted in transparency, institutional resilience, and global integration;

Preventing irreversible deterioration and deepening dependency on Russia;

Preserving human capital and institutional memory within Belarusian society and its diaspora;

Designing adaptable policy frameworks for post-transition economic governance.

This coordinated effort will not only mitigate current risks but also accelerate the country's recovery once political conditions change. Economic security, in this context, is both a long-term goal and a guiding principle for shaping a future Belarus that is sovereign, resilient, and integrated into the global community.



Migration Security

01. General Context

Belarus occupies a strategically important position in the context of European migration security due to its location on the EU's eastern frontier and its close alliance with Russia. As a transit corridor between Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, Belarus has the potential to influence migratory flows into the European Union—either as a partner in border management or, as seen in recent years, as a source of hybrid threats.

The Belarus regime's instrumentalization of migration demonstrated how state actors can exploit migration routes for political leverage, testing the EU's ability to protect its borders while upholding humanitarian obligations. This makes Belarus not only a focal point of concern for regional stability but also a critical element in shaping the EU's broader strategy on migration, border resilience, and hybrid threat preparedness.

In 2021, when the Belarus regime deliberately engineered a migration crisis by facilitating the arrival of migrants from the Middle East and Africa

to the EU borders, most notably Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia²⁵. Unlike traditional migration flows driven by conflict or economic necessity, this wave was orchestrated by a state actor as part of a calculated strategy of hybrid warfare.

In retaliation for EU sanctions and criticism following the fraudulent 2020 presidential election and violent crackdown on protests, the Belarus regime issued fast-track visas and lured migrants with false promises of easy entry into the EU, only to abandon them in border zones under dire conditions. The EU termed such a strategy a “hybrid warfare” through the “instrumentalization of migrants for political purposes²⁶.”

This weaponization of migration, implicitly backed by Russia through political support and coordinated disinformation, represented more than a localised humanitarian crisis²⁷. It exposed the EU's vulnerability to hybrid threats from hostile authoritarian regimes.

02. Migration as a Hybrid Threat

Historically, Belarus has benefited from positioning itself between Russia and the European Union, striving to maintain this strategic balance by acting as a self-proclaimed “regional security donor.” Lukashenka frequently emphasized his role in bolstering border infrastructure to enhance the security of both Belarus and the EU. However, this engagement was short-lived, and after 2020, the Lukashenka regime changed its rhetoric, threatening to flood Europe with drugs and migrants.

Instrumentalized migration as a pressure tool

against the EU's sanctions has been an attractive strategy for the Belarus regime for several reasons²⁸.

First, compared to military escalation or economic retaliation, it is a relatively low-cost method with a high political impact. Since the 2015 migration crisis, migration from Western Asia and Africa has become a deeply divisive issue in Europe, fueling the rise of populist parties in various EU member states. The resulting internal fragmentation makes instrumentalized migration a potent method for exploiting EU vulnerabilities. Public opinion in

25. *Belarus border crisis: How are migrants getting there?; Poland-Belarus border crisis: what is going on and who is to blame*, Politico, 2024.

26. *Commission proposes measures to strengthen border security and counter hybrid threats*, European Commission, 2024.

27. *Belarus migrants: Poland PM blames Russia's Putin for migrant crisis*, BBC, 2021.

28. *Between Security and Human Rights: Addressing State-Sponsored Instrumentalization of Migration by Belarus and Russia*, Pulaski Policy Papers, 2024.

Europe is often split between calls for strict border control and demands to uphold asylum seekers' rights. Democratic governments risk backlash if they violate international humanitarian norms, making it difficult to respond forcefully to such tactics.

Second, the Lukashenka regime may have been motivated by financial considerations. The

smuggling of migrants offered a potent revenue stream, with some individuals reportedly paying up to \$15,000 for the journey²⁹. Moreover, many who arrived in 2021 had used Belavia airlines, the state-owned company that had lost substantial business following the EU's airspace ban on the 4th of June, 2021³⁰ and providing the Belarus regime with another financial incentive to facilitate migration.

03. Russia's Involvement in the Instrumentalization of Migration

Belarus' actions in response to EU sanctions were likely not unplanned. The use of migration as a geopolitical tool requires detailed coordination and logistical support. It has been argued that as early as 2011–2012, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Belarusian KGB had conceptualized a strategy, allegedly referred to as "Operation Lock", designed to manipulate migration flows for political and economic leverage over the EU³¹. Thus, such operations can be framed as part of a broader hybrid warfare approach, wherein Russia and Belarus exploit existing EU vulnerabilities through calculated, non-military tactics that avoid triggering conventional conflict. The objective is to undermine border security and deepen internal political divisions within EU member states.

According to Frontex, the EU's border and coast guard agency, the Eastern border registered

over 2,680 irregular border crossings in 2024³². The main nationalities were Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, and Syria, war-torn nations that make deportations difficult, if not impossible³³. In 2024, irregular arrivals at the EU-Belarusian border - especially the Polish-Belarusian border - increased significantly by 66% compared to 2023³⁴. According to the European Commission, over 90% of migrants crossing illegally from Belarus to Poland hold Russian student or tourist visas³⁵.

For Russia, this dynamic offers clear strategic benefits. It helps preserve Belarus as a loyal and dependent ally while simultaneously destabilizing neighboring countries and prolonging regional tensions.

29. *Inside Belarus' secret program to undermine the EU*, Politico, 2024.

30. *EU bans Belarusian carriers from its airspace and airports*, Council of the EU, 2021.

31. *Addressing State-Sponsored Instrumentalization of Migration by Belarus and Russia*, Pulaski Policy Papers, 2024.

32. *Ukrainians fleeing the war were the largest group, with 13,847 border crossings; they are provided immediate protection under a special EU law*.

33. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/12/11/brussels-green-lights-polands-plan-to-temporarily-suspend-right-to-asylum>

34. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_6251

35. *EU Border Measures Target Migrant Weaponization by Russia, Belarus*;

04. Humanitarian Risks

The most immediate threat is the humanitarian emergency created at the EU's borders. Thousands of migrants have been stranded in forests and border zones, facing freezing temperatures during the winter months, a lack of medical assistance, and food shortages. The Belarusian authorities, in some cases, prevented migrants from returning to Minsk or retreating from the border, effectively using them as human shields³⁶. According to the civil society group *We Are Monitoring*, at least 87 people died near the border between September 2021 and October 2024, including 14 recorded deaths in 2024 alone³⁷.

Migration crisis placed the EU in a difficult position – having to balance the need for border security with its obligations under international refugee law, raising concerns about possible breaches of human rights and the EU's commitment to the *principle of non-refoulement*, which prohibits sending individuals back to places where they may face persecution, torture, or inhuman or degrading

treatment³⁸. International customary law forbids it even during national emergencies³⁹ or war and formalizes its validity also in border regions⁴⁰.



05. Political Destabilization and Polarization in the EU

The crisis fueled anti-immigration sentiment within the EU, empowering movements that pushed for stricter immigration policies and criticized the EU's management of asylum procedures⁴¹. This dynamic has contributed to political fragmentation across Member States⁴², exacerbating disagreements over the distribution of responsibility for border management and asylum seekers.

The Polish government has framed the instrumentalized migration on the border with Belarus as a national security issue. In line with

that, both chambers of the Polish Parliament have passed a bill temporarily suspending the right to seek asylum in Poland, which was signed into law by the President Andrzej Duda in March 2025⁴³. In addition, the security dimensions of instrumentalised migration have strongly influenced the priorities of Poland's presidency of the Council of the EU. Poland presented a programme under the slogan "Security, Europe!" that broke down the concept of security into seven different dimensions, including migration security. Among its top objectives is the response to hybrid

36. *Violence and Pushbacks at Poland-Belarus Border*

37. *At the Poland-Belarus border, security and migration merge into one | Euronews*

38. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/12/10/poland-brutal-pushbacks-belarus-border>

39. *Legal considerations on asylum and non-refoulement in the context of 'instrumentalization', UNHCR, 2024.*

40. *Access to territory and non-refoulement, UNHCR, 2025.*

41. *Far-right nationalists march in Poland amid border crisis with Belarus, The Times of Israel, 2021.*

42. *Poland-Belarus migrant crisis: Where does the EU stand?, Aljazeera, 2021*

43. *Polish senate greenlights bill to curb asylum rights, Barrons, 2023.*

threats targeting both people and borders⁴⁴.

Similarly, on 12 July 2024, Finland enacted the Act on Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalised Migration, permitting border guards to push back individuals crossing from Russia without allowing them to apply for asylum. The law, passed by a wide parliamentary majority, can be activated when there is a “justified suspicion” of foreign interference threatening Finland’s sovereignty and national security. Its scope and duration are strictly limited: the government must define the specific border area affected, and enforcement may last no longer than one month or until the threat subsides⁴⁵.

In its December 2024 Communication⁴⁶, the European Commission reaffirmed that Member States are responsible for safeguarding the EU’s external borders while fully respecting

fundamental rights, particularly the principle of non-refoulement. In light of the persistent and serious threats to the EU’s security and the territorial integrity of its Member States, especially along the borders with Russia and Belarus, the Commission acknowledged that, under exceptional and narrowly defined circumstances, Member States may invoke Treaty provisions that permit them to adopt measures exceeding those outlined in EU secondary legislation. Such actions remain subject to judicial oversight by the Court of Justice of the European Union. While these measures may entail substantial limitations on fundamental rights, including the right to asylum and related protections, they must nonetheless adhere to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Communication outlines the criteria for their application: they must be proportionate, strictly necessary, clearly limited in scope, and temporary in duration.

06. Geopolitical Strategy of Authoritarian Regimes

This migration crisis is not just a retaliation tactic of the Belarus regime against sanctions – it is also a broader test of Western resilience.

Lukashenka’s use of instrumentalised migration serves multiple strategic purposes. First, it seeks to weaken the unity of the EU by exacerbating internal divisions over border security, migration policy, and asylum management. This fragmentation hampers the EU’s ability to present a coherent and unified response.

Second, the crisis acts as a distraction from the Belarus regime’s intensified domestic repression, diverting international attention away from human rights abuses within Belarus. By shifting the focus to external security threats, Lukashenka tries to consolidate his position internally and justify authoritarian measures.

Third, the migration crisis signals Belarus’ firm alignment with Russia, showcasing their coordinated use of hybrid tactics, those that fall

below the threshold of conventional warfare but aim to destabilize opponents through multifaceted pressure. This includes exploiting vulnerabilities in EU border management and social cohesion.

Finally, the tactic is designed to coerce the EU into negotiations, with Lukashenka leveraging the crisis as political capital. By creating a humanitarian and security emergency, he positions himself as a necessary interlocutor who can offer stability in exchange for sanctions relief or political recognition. This form of coercive diplomacy seeks to extract concessions while undermining EU policies aimed at promoting democracy and human rights in Belarus.

A Catalyst for Policy Reform

The Belarus-orchestrated migration crisis has acted as a wake-up call for the EU, providing political momentum for long-delayed reforms in migration and asylum policy. In particular, it underscored the urgent need for a harmonised

44. *Priorities, Polish presidency Council of the European Union, 2025.*

45. *After Finland legalised migrant pushbacks, many fear a ‘dangerous precedent’, EuroNews, 2024.*

46. *Commission steps up support for Member States to strengthen EU security and counter the weaponisation of migration, European Commission, 2024.*

asylum system that enables a more coordinated and efficient response to sudden migratory pressures, especially when used as a tool of hybrid warfare.

The crisis strengthened the case for the EU Operational Response to migration challenges. As a result of Belarus' manipulation of migration flows at the borders with Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland in 2021, and more recently by Russia at the Finnish border, the EU rapidly stepped up its financial, operational, and diplomatic support. These efforts were not limited to crisis management but also contributed to building longer-term resilience along the EU's eastern frontier.

In December 2024, the European Commission announced an additional €170 million in funding through the Border Management and Visa Instrument (BMVI), including €150 million in direct border support and €20 million from the BMVI Thematic Facility⁴⁷. This funding is being allocated to strengthen real-time surveillance, telecommunication systems, mobile detection, and counter-drone technologies in countries such as Poland (€52 million), Finland (€50 million), Estonia (€19.4 million), Latvia (€17 million), Lithuania (€15.4 million), and Norway (€16.4 million). These measures aim to enhance situational awareness, increase the mobility of border patrols, and fortify Europe's outer borders against further manipulation.

Such decisive financial mobilization also demonstrates the EU's capacity to quickly deploy resources when faced with non-traditional threats, strengthening its credibility in crisis response and bolstering public confidence in its institutions.

Strengthening EU-NATO Cooperation

The crisis has highlighted the blurred boundaries between civilian and military domains in modern hybrid conflicts. The instrumentalization of

migration, used as a non-military tool to destabilise and provoke EU Member States, has brought renewed urgency to calls for closer EU-NATO coordination.

This opens new avenues for strategic cooperation, particularly in the fields of border security, cyber resilience, joint intelligence sharing, counter-disinformation strategies, and rapid reaction capabilities. Integrating migration-related hybrid threats into joint EU-NATO threat assessments and exercises would help both organizations better prepare for similar scenarios in the future, particularly along the eastern flank.

Proactive Engagement with Countries of Origin

The crisis also highlighted the importance of sustained diplomatic engagement with countries of origin and transit, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. Many migrants were deceived by Belarusian state propaganda and private intermediaries into believing that safe and legal entry into the EU was possible via Belarus. Countering such manipulation requires the EU to step up public information campaigns, expand legal migration pathways, and conclude readmission and mobility agreements with partner countries. For example, Poland has already initiated an international awareness campaign aimed at discouraging irregular migration from several African and Asian countries. The initiative targets potential migrants in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Pakistan, and Egypt, warning them of the risks and legal consequences of attempting to enter the EU through irregular routes⁴⁸.

Greater cooperation with origin and transit countries not only helps disrupt human smuggling networks and propaganda campaigns but also allows the EU to offer viable alternatives to irregular migration, thereby reducing the effectiveness of coercive strategies that exploit vulnerable populations for geopolitical gain.

47. *Commission steps up support for Member States to strengthen EU security and counter the weaponisation of migration, European Commission, 2024.*

48. *Poland launches awareness campaign to deter Asian, African migrants, TVP World, 2025.*

07. Civil Society Mobilization and Support for Belarusian Democracy

The international attention drawn to the humanitarian crisis also reinvigorated the efforts of Belarus' democratic forces and civil society actors in exile. The mistreatment of migrants, many of whom were trapped by the actions of the Lukashenka regime, strengthened the case for increased EU support for independent Belarusian media, human rights organizations, and the democratic forces.

This crisis reaffirmed the importance of supporting Belarusian civil society as a vital actor not only in advocating for democracy and human rights but also in exposing the authoritarian regime's tactics of coercion and manipulation. Sustained EU investment in civil society infrastructure and the information environment, especially in border regions, can help counter hybrid threats in the short term and foster long-term democratic transformation in the region.



Recommendations:

To effectively respond to and mitigate the risks of state-manipulated migration crises, the EU and its partners should adopt a comprehensive and forward-looking approach:

01

Integrate migration manipulation into the EU's hybrid threat doctrine:

Recognize state-orchestrated migration crises as deliberate security threats and include them in EU-NATO joint threat assessments, exercises, and crisis response mechanisms. Treat migration security as a core component of European security policy, not merely a humanitarian issue.

02

Review and build a cohesive and agile migration policy:

Finalise and implement a reformed Common European Asylum System that allows for rapid coordination and responsibility-sharing during crises and enhances humanitarian response capabilities at external borders while maintaining compliance with international refugee obligations.

03

Strengthen deterrence through targeted sanctions:

Expand restrictive measures against Belarusian and Russian individuals, entities, and state-linked airlines involved in organizing or enabling migrant smuggling. Increase EU capacities to trace and block logistics and financial flows behind such operations.

04

Reinforce frontline defenses and hybrid threat preparedness:

Increase funding for advanced border surveillance, counter-drone systems, and integrated early warning infrastructure along the EU's eastern frontier. Expand joint EU-NATO training for hybrid threat response, focusing on migration-linked scenarios.

05

Invest in democratic resilience in Belarus:

Sustain and expand support for Belarusian civil society, independent media, and democratic forces working to expose the regime's abuses and disinformation. Empower these actors as early warning sources and key partners in deterring future coercive actions from Minsk and Moscow.

06

Coordinate strategic communication across EU institutions:

Develop unified, fact-based narratives to counter Belarusian and Russian propaganda, both externally and within EU member states. Emphasize the security dimension of migration manipulation to foster cohesion among governments and maintain public trust.

Military Security

Belarus plays a critical role in the EU's military security due to its location on NATO's eastern flank and its deepening military integration with Russia. As a staging ground for Russian forces and hybrid operations, Belarus poses a direct threat to neighboring EU member states and undermines regional stability. Ensuring a sovereign and Europe-oriented Belarus is essential for reducing the Kremlin's strategic reach and strengthening Europe's collective defense.

01. General Context

At the moment, the Belarus regime is a co-aggressor in Russia's war against Ukraine. While the Belarusian military is not taking direct part in this aggression, its troops are taking part in various activities with the Russian army on the territory of both states. Aliaksandr Lukashenka personally

supports the actions of the Kremlin while supporting its narrative about Ukraine attacking Russia at the command of NATO. However, there are a couple of factors to describe the current state of the conventional security of Belarus.

02. Belarus as a Field for Russian Hybrid Attacks

Belarus has become a key platform for Russian hybrid operations targeting EU member states. Among the most pressing threats is the instrumentalization of irregular migration, orchestrated in coordination with Russian security services, to destabilize EU borders—particularly in Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. In parallel, Belarusian citizens have been used by Russian

and Belarusian intelligence services to infiltrate Western countries and carry out espionage, sabotage, and disinformation activities. According to Polish intelligence, several documented cases link Belarusian nationals to hostile operations, highlighting the growing threat posed by Belarus-based networks to the security of the entire EU.

03. Belarus as Russia's War Supply Line

Belarus' industry is part of the Kremlin's military machine. According to the independent media and investigators, at the moment, more than 60% of Belarusian military industry products are exported to Russia⁴⁹. In whole, Russia's share in Belarusian external trade in 2024 exceeded 70%⁵⁰. Belarus' exports directly help the Kremlin to wage the war

against Ukraine, amounting to 15% of all Russian military procurements⁵¹. This concerns not only the factories being part of the defense industry of Belarus. For example, tires produced by OAO (JSC) Belshina plant are supplied to the Russian defense ministry and used for a range of vehicles and weapons chassis used by the Russian army in

49. *How Belarusian Factories Support the Russian Military-Industrial Complex*, Charter97, 2024.

50. *Exports Are Growing, but Imports Are Growing Faster: Why Belarus Is Losing Its Foreign Trade Balance*, ProBusiness, 2024.

51. *Belarus-Russia Cooperation in the Military-Technical Sphere Is Gaining Momentum*, Sb.by, 2023.

Ukraine⁵². However, Belshina was excluded from the EU sanctions list in March 2024⁵³. The range of goods supplied to the Russian military is wide and varies from food and clothes to ammunition⁵⁴.

At the same time, it has to be stated that Belarus is a significant source of grey schemes for Russia to circumvent sanctions. Belarusian industrial enterprises of various scales are used to supply goods, which are banned from being imported to Russia. Some of them, like microchips by Integral, are crucial for the production of the missiles, used by the Russian army to attack Ukrainian cities⁵⁵. The supply of whole branches of military goods to Russia is dependent on these schemes, like advanced electronics and optoelectronics, essential for guiding and control systems of various weapons, including armored vehicles.

According to the agreements between Belarus and Russia, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus are fully included in the "Regional Group of Forces of Belarus and Russia" on the territory of Belarus. All Belarusian military infrastructure can be used by the Regional Group of Forces, i.e., Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in wartime⁵⁶. Within this framework, the Regional united system of air defense of Belarus and Russia has been created, which also gives the Kremlin control over the territory of Belarus. At the same time, the size of Russian troops, included in the Regional Group of Forces isn't precisely limited in the documents, which makes it completely legal for the Kremlin to deploy as many army units in Belarus as it wants⁵⁷.

The Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus are also dependent on Russia both technologically and

ideologically. After February 2022, Russia became the only supplier of weapons to Belarus. At the same time, one has to note that the overwhelming majority of Belarusian highest military officers, including the highest command studied in Russia, while maintaining the connections to Russia. This concerns not only a narrow range of military specialists and high command in the Armed Forces, but 100% of KGB servicemen, who have an obligation to spend a part of their education period in the Academy of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). Which creates not only the high probability of them being ideologically tied to Russia more than to Belarus, but also the threat of the most strategic departments of the military and law enforcement agencies being infiltrated or even controlled by the agents of Russian services. Against this background, the military propaganda of the Lukashenka regime echoes the Russian narratives about the war against Ukraine using definitions like "Nazi regime in Kyiv", "NATO orchestrating the war against Russia", etc. This completes the picture of the integration of Lukashenka's military system into the Russian one.

Given the above-mentioned, one can state that Belarus is de facto a proxy of Russia, while the key military decisions are taken in the Kremlin. The regime in Minsk doesn't have any influence on the activities of the Russian military and special services on the territory of Belarus. To underline that, on March 14, 2025, Lukashenka publicly acknowledged he wasn't informed about Russian plans to invade Ukraine from the territory of Belarus in February 2022⁵⁸.

52. *Belarusian gambit. How Belshina continued to supply the Russian military*, Belarusian Investigative Centre, 2024.

53. *Arret du tribunal*, InfoCuria Rechtsprechung, 2024.

54. *Lukashenka Has Dragged Belarus into the War*, Belpol, 2025.

55. *Deadly chips. How Integral bypasses sanctions and helps Russia keep the war going*, Belarusian Investigative Centre, 2025.

56. *Agreement Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on Joint Protection of the External Border of the Union State in Airspace and the Establishment of a Unified Regional Air Defense System of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus*, Ministry of international affairs, 2009.

57. *Protocol Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on Amendments to the Agreement Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on Joint Provision of Regional Security in the Military Sphere of 19 December 1997*, 2022.

58. *Lukashenka on Zelensky: "He Was Like a Son to Me, but Acted Like a Scumbag..." — Interview with Skabeyeva*, The first national channel of Belarusian radio, 2025.



Threats and Risks

Usage of Belarus as a ground for a direct military offensive against EU and NATO member-states.

Moscow considers various scenarios of escalation with NATO, some of which include a plan to attack the Baltic States or Poland from the territory of Belarus. Russian propaganda for domestic and foreign audiences creates the image of the EU as a “new Third Reich”, which is eager to destroy Russia. This is the official position of the MFA of Russian Federation, stating in its documents that “the Eurobureaucracy nurtured the Nazi regime in Kiev in order to unite Europe under racist and Nazi banners for a war against Russia”⁵⁹. A massive ideological preparation of the Russians for the war against NATO is being observed. An attack on Lithuania or Latvia in order to check Article 5 of NATO has already appeared in the public space as a plan of Moscow for the near future. In the escalation scenario, Belarus’ territory becomes crucial for the Kremlin as a ground for launching an attack on any of the Baltic States or Poland and a tactical rear in such a conflict. This role of Belarus has already been worked out in the first 2 months of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Hybrid aggression against a NATO member-state under the guise of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus. Russian propaganda constantly underlines that Belarus is an independent state and its authorities make all decisions sovereignly. Thus, using the flag of the Lukashenka regime to attack or provoke the neighbouring states can be a part of Putin’s plans for escalation in the region. For example, an attack on the border guard of Lithuania or Latvia by Russian troops under the guise of Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus can be used by the Kremlin to check the possible reaction of the NATO member-states. Any armed response can be presented by the Kremlin as an attack on the so-called Union State of Russia and Belarus, which will become the reason for the usage of the Regional Group of Forces in order to “protect the territorial integrity of the Union State.

Another scenario is a direct invasion of Lithuania or Latvia by the Russian army under the guise of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus in order to interrupt the decision-making process

59. *Report by the MFA of Russia «Eighty Years After the Great Victory: Europe has Once Again Fallen in the Shadow of Nazism», Ministry of international affairs, 2025.*

concerning the response in NATO member-states and shift responsibility for the aggression to the Lukashenka regime. This could be accompanied by a complete refusal to recognize any Russian involvement in this operation by the official Moscow, as it happened in 2014 during the annexation of Crimea.

Usage of nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus under the guise of the Armed Forces of Belarus can be the continuation of the previously mentioned scenarios of Russian military escalation against the NATO member-states. In case Moscow is not successful in reaching its strategic goals, it can use nuclear weapons, which is publicly stated by the Russian highest officials like the Security Council Deputy Secretary Dmitry Medvedev. Such an attack will also be aiming to disturb the decision-making in NATO and leave possibilities for diplomatic maneuvering for the Kremlin, formally shifting responsibility to the Lukashenka regime.

Direct usage of certain troops of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus by the Russian command within the framework of the Regional Group of Forces for military aggression against NATO member-states. The Lukashenka regime propaganda echoes the Russian rhetoric

threatening the Baltic States and preparing the people of Belarus for Moscow's war against the West. In case Russia decides to launch full-scale aggression against any NATO member states, it is not impossible to exclude the scenario of using the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus for some special activities. For example, some part of the Belarusian military can be used in the role of "good policeman" in comparison to extremel rough action by the Russian troops in order to carry out police missions in the occupied territories as well as create a picture of "noble troops, who are nice with the local people, providing them with all necessary humanitarian aid". The Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus can also be used to stage a picture of "people gladly meeting the liberators" in the territory of the Baltic States, where many Russian-speakers live. At the same time, the experience of the Lukashenka regime's military and enforcement agencies in suppressing civil activities and protests inside Belarus can be used in this case for corresponding activities in the occupied territories. However, the lack of battlefield experience as well as dubious loyalty of the soldiers and lower officer corps will possibly stop the Russian commanders from using them on the frontline.

Opportunities

Bringing Belarus out of Russia's orbit and integrating it into the European security architecture would strip the Kremlin of its 'strategic balcony' — a critical staging ground for potential aggression against NATO member states. This will decrease the operative possibilities of the Kremlin in the short and mid-term. Taking into consideration the official declarations of the Kremlin, the actions to diminish its military capabilities in terms of territory are a strategic interest of NATO and the EU.

However, in the current situation, the Lukashenka regime can't be relied upon in any kind of efforts on pushing out Russian influence and military out of Belarus, as it is incapable of fulfilling any agreements, having no legal and de facto leverage on the situation in the sphere of national security and defense. At the same time, understanding the importance of Belarus for the peace in the region is crucial for guaranteeing security in Eastern Europe in the long term.

Belarus' being fully sovereign and free of Kremlin military influence also means decreasing the border with Russia to defend for NATO. In case Belarus is not controlled by Moscow, the border of the EU and Ukraine to defend if Russia again decides to use military power as a tool of diplomacy in the region will decrease almost 2 times: from 2,334 km to 1,283 km, as only Eastern border of Belarus with Russia would have to be protected. At the same time, this will keep the borders of Poland and Lithuania safe from possible Russian massive attack, while Vilnius and Kyiv – the capitals of Lithuania and Ukraine, situated near border with Belarus – will be definitely more protected from possible threat from the Kremlin.

Creating infrastructure to deter Russia more successfully should be an important plan for the transformation of Belarus in the future. The Russian early warning military facilities in Belarus should be replaced by the Belarusian ones, serving for the common European defense system. The establishment of full-scale border control as well

as physical protection of the border between Belarus and Russia will be positively appreciated by Belarusians, as it will help to stop the influx of contraband alcohol, drugs and organised crime from Russia to Belarus, which is happening at the

moment. This will help in stopping budgetary losses due to the above-mentioned phenomena as well as prevent the illegal migration flows organized and controlled by the Kremlin.

Recommendations:

01

Treat Belarus as a Strategic Military Frontier.

The EU must recognize the territory of Belarus as a forward-operating space for Russian military, hybrid, and intelligence activities. Belarus should be assessed not only as a site of potential escalation but as a current and ongoing source of threats to the EU's eastern flank. This demands permanent integration of Belarus-specific monitoring into EU and NATO strategic planning, military foresight, and threat assessment frameworks.

02

Embed Belarusian Expertise in EU and NATO Security Institutions.

Belarusian democratic forces and the diaspora offer vital contextual intelligence on Russian military, proxy, and influence activities. The EU should institutionalize cooperation with Belarusian OSINT groups, analysts, and investigators by embedding them into EU/NATO-affiliated early warning and hybrid threat units. Their insights are critical to detecting covert escalation, Russian military logistics, and regime manipulation strategies.

03

Support Security Sector Planning for a Post-Lukashenko Transition.

EU institutions should provide structured support to Belarusian democratic forces in drafting a future-oriented security sector reform plan. This includes scenarios for demilitarizing Russian presence, restructuring the armed forces, and aligning defense infrastructure with European standards. Preparing Belarus for post-authoritarian defense integration is essential to ensuring NATO's eastern borders remain secure long-term.

04

Bolster Belarusian Civil Society to Disrupt Hybrid Warfare.

Civil society is the first line of defense against disinformation, infiltration, and foreign influence. The EU must expand funding and technical assistance for Belarusian independent media, fact-checkers, civic educators, and grassroots democratic organizations—both to counteract Kremlin propaganda and to erode the regime's control over Belarusian territory and institutions.

05

Invest in Real-Time Intelligence and Hybrid Threat Monitoring.

The EU must scale up its capacity to monitor Belarus-related military and hybrid threats in real time. This includes surveillance of troop movements, irregular migration flows, logistical build-ups, cyber operations, and disinformation campaigns. This monitoring effort should be multi-layered—drawing from governmental, civil society, and diaspora sources—and coordinated with NATO where appropriate.

Youth Security

01. General Context

The resilience, values, and political orientation of young generations directly shape the long-term stability of the European neighborhood. In Belarus, youth stand at the intersection of authoritarian repression and democratic potential. Following the falsified 2020 election, young Belarusians—students, professionals, and activists—played a central role in the pro-democracy movement and became primary targets of regime violence, imprisonment, and exile.

This generation is the driving force for democratic change. Their future trajectory—whether shaped by state propaganda and isolation or by European values and opportunity—will determine whether Belarus moves toward sovereignty and democracy or remains a platform for Russian influence. Engaging Belarusian youth is a strategic move, not a humanitarian gesture. This section assesses how youth are impacted by the regime's repression and why targeted EU support to empower, protect, and connect them is a long-term investment in regional security and democratic transformation.



02. Repression of Youth

The Lukashenka regime's crackdown has disproportionately affected young Belarusians, treating them as a threat to the regime's survival. Alarming, approximately 45% of these political prisoners are under the age of 35⁶⁰, attesting to the targeted persecution of the younger generation.

Hundreds of students were expelled and many fled. Those who remained faced arrests, including public “mobile trials” used as intimidation. Youth civil society was dismantled as over 1,600 organisations were liquidated, silencing independent platforms for youth participation⁶¹.

The regime also targets youth organizations. Over 1,600 independent NGOs, associations, and media outlets have been forcibly dissolved since 2021⁶², effectively eradicating independent youth and student groups. This dismantling of youth civil society deprives young Belarusians of platforms to engage in their communities and advocate for their interests.

Mass exile has been another consequence of the repression. By some estimates, more than 300,000 Belarusians have had to flee since 2020 due to political repression⁶³. Many of these

60. *The protection of youth rights and support of young political prisoners of Belarus, Youth Forum, 2023.*

61. *What is happening in Belarusian education and academia four years after the presidential elections of August 2020?, New Eastern Europe Magazine, 2024.*

62. *Continuing repression and deterioration of the human rights situation in Belarus, United Nations, 2023.*

63. *The protection of youth rights and support of young political prisoners of Belarus, Youth Forum, 2023.*

exiles are students, recent graduates, and young professionals who would have formed the backbone of Belarus' future. Poland and Lithuania – EU neighbours offering refuge – have absorbed much of this exodus, with Poland alone hosting roughly 12,000 Belarusian students in 2022⁶⁴.

Belarusian youth are cornered by repression or

exile, which undermines EU efforts to promote stability and democratic values at its borders. State policy has fractured and scattered a generation — a loss for Belarus, and a challenge for EU engagement. European policymakers should regard the plight of Belarusian youth not just as a human rights crisis, but as a security concern for the region.

03. Exodus and Brain Drain

The mass migration of young Belarusians has escalated into a significant **brain drain**, with worrying implications for both Belarus and Europe. As noted, at least **300,000 Belarusians have left the country since 2020** (and possibly far more), according to analyses of population data⁶⁵.

Crucially, the outflow is concentrated among the young and educated. Analysts estimate that roughly **5% of Belarus' working-age population has emigrated in the past three years**, a disproportionate number of them being skilled professionals under 35. This has led to acute labour shortages in key sectors: for instance, in 2022, the healthcare system was short 8,000 workers and the construction industry 11,000 workers compared to pre-crackdown levels. These gaps illustrate how the repression-fueled brain drain is directly undermining Belarus' economic capacity and public services.

The IT sector – previously a crown jewel of the Belarusian economy – has been hit especially hard by the exodus of youth. Belarus had cultivated a vibrant tech industry, but political instability and crackdowns after 2020 prompted thousands of IT specialists (largely young) to relocate to more secure environments. The IT sector, once a key economic driver, lost over 20,000 workers and saw its GDP contribution fall from 7.5% to 5% in a year, reversing years of growth⁶⁶. Losing so many young innovators and entrepreneurs not only weakens the current economy but also diminishes the prospects for any future recovery or modernization.

Beyond the statistics are human stories that

reflect a loss of hope in the system. Thousands of Belarusian students have sought education abroad, unwilling to study in an oppressive environment at home. Neighbouring EU countries have opened their universities to these students – for example, the Polish government's scholarships and the EU-supported **Kalinowski program** as well as EU tools like Erasmus+ and EU4Youth. These programmes should be expanded into dedicated Belarus tracks to reach more displaced students and young professionals⁶⁷. As a result, Poland and Lithuania host large communities of Belarusian youth in exile. In Poland, as noted, there were about 12,000 Belarusian students in 2022, and similar numbers are studying in Lithuania, Ukraine (before the war), and farther afield in Western Europe. The EU must view youth emigration as a strategic challenge and expand safe, legal pathways for education and employment, while keeping this generation connected to Europe..

The Belarusian authorities themselves implicitly acknowledge this brain drain problem through the frantic measures they have taken to stem the outflow. In 2023, the regime amended its military service law to penalise studying abroad: previously, young men could defer conscription by enrolling in a university (domestic or foreign), but now **"studying abroad is no longer grounds"** for draft exemption⁶⁸. This effectively tries to trap male students in Belarus under the threat of military call-up if they leave. The government is also expanding an anachronistic Soviet-era policy of mandatory job placements for graduates. Belarus is the only country in Europe still assigning university graduates to compulsory two-year

65. *A depopulating country. Belarus's demographic situation, OSW, 2023.*

66. *A depopulating country. Belarus's demographic situation, OSW, 2023.*

67. *Expelled and persecuted Belarusian students find refuge at Lithuanian universities, New Eastern Europe Magazin, 2021.*

68. *What is happening in Belarusian education and academia four years after the presidential elections of August 2020?, New Eastern Europe Magazine, 2024.*

postings (a policy called “distribution”); now Lukashenka has ordered this to be extended to all graduates, even those who paid for their studies, and possibly lengthened to up to five years. The aim is openly to *“halt the brain drain”* by tying young professionals to the country, as Lukashenka lamented the *“excessive outflow of high-skilled specialists”* in a 2023 speech⁶⁹.

Furthermore, in a move transparently designed to discourage academic emigration, Belarus *withdrew from an education recognition agreement with Poland*, causing Polish universities to require additional paperwork from Belarusian applicants. Belarus’ Ministry of Education then began refusing to issue the needed certificates that prove a student’s academic credentials, deliberately blocking young people from foreign study. Poland responded by simplifying the recognition of Belarusian diplomas unilaterally, but bureaucratic hurdles remain, and *“dozens of young people”* have been unable to enrol in Polish institutions due to missing documents, which they cannot safely return to Belarus to obtain⁷⁰.

These regime tactics underscore the severity of Belarus’ youth exodus. The mass flight of youth

represents not just a demographic crisis for Belarus but *a security risk for Europe*. A Belarus drained of talent, with a collapsing economy, will be ever more dependent on external patronage (primarily Russia’s) to stay afloat. This could lead to deeper integration of Belarus into Russia’s military and economic structures, cementing a hostile bloc on the EU’s border. Additionally, a continuing exodus could result in irregular migration pressures on neighbouring countries if pathways for legal study/work abroad are choked off – something the Lukashenka regime has previously exploited by orchestrating migrant crises.

For Europe, there is a moral and strategic imperative to address this brain drain. By providing opportunities and support for Belarusian youth in exile, the EU can *mitigate the negative effects* (for instance, by absorbing their skills into European economies in the short term) while also preserving this human capital for a future democratic Belarus. Conversely, neglecting the problem could mean a lost generation and a persistent source of instability in Europe’s neighbourhood.

04. Ideological Indoctrination

Inside Belarus, those young people who remain face another threat: the systematic misuse of education and information to indoctrinate and control them. The Lukashenka regime, with active support from Moscow, is reshaping the educational system into an instrument of ideology and propaganda. This *“ideologization and militarisation”* of education serves to cement authoritarian rule in the present and to mould the worldview of the next generation in ways that align with Russian and Soviet narratives⁷¹. Such efforts not only crush independent thought and academic freedom in Belarus but also pose long-term challenges for European security by alienating Belarusian youth from democratic values and aligning them with anti-Western sentiments.

One facet of this strategy is the tightening of state control over all levels of education. In the wake of the 2020 protests, authorities moved aggressively to purge and monopolise the educational sphere. Private schools and universities, seen as potential havens of liberal thought, have been targeted for closure. A 2022 licensing law was used to force a mass shutdown of non-state educational institutions – over 20 private schools were shuttered, with only a handful allowed to continue operating under strict ideological supervision. Even tutorial centres that prepare students for university have been “inspected” and hit with politically motivated charges⁷². Several independent higher education institutes (such as the University of Law and Social Information Technologies in Minsk)

69. *A depopulating country. Belarus’s demographic situation*, OSW, 2023.

70. *What is happening in Belarusian education and academia four years after the presidential elections of August 2020?*, New Eastern Europe Magazine, 2024.

71. *Belarus: the indoctrination of minors is rising in scale and taking on new forms*, EU vs. DiSiNFO, 2023.

72. *What is happening in Belarusian education and academia four years after the presidential elections of August 2020?*, New Eastern Europe Magazine, 2024.

were outright closed in 2023, abruptly displacing *"several thousand students,"* who were forced to transfer to state universities, and leaving their professors unemployed. By closing alternatives, the regime enforces its official doctrine.

Within state educational institutions, authorities have launched an all-out campaign of political indoctrination. The 2022–2023 school year saw a *"major intensification of activities"* aimed at controlling young minds⁷³. Lukashenka declared 2023 a "Year of Peace and Creation," and under this banner, schools introduced compulsory classes extolling the Belarus regime's so-called achievements and promoting the government's line on history and society. Curricula were revised to include *"specially selected motifs from Belarusian history"*, designed to boost patriotism – in practice, loyalty to Lukashenka. Schools across the country have been ordered to establish patriotic exhibition rooms that display curated historical narratives. Tellingly, these exhibits are reported to be *"dominated by anti-Western and pro-Russian historical narratives."* Soviet-era symbols and stories (celebrating the USSR and the Great Patriotic War narrative) are foregrounded, while symbols associated with Belarusian independence or the pro-democracy movement are denigrated or erased. The regime aims to reshape historical memory to block democratic narratives — a challenge for EU soft power in the region.

The militarization of youth education goes hand-in-hand with ideological conditioning. In late 2021, Belarus adopted a comprehensive Programme for the Patriotic Education of Citizens for 2022–2025⁷⁴. An Inter-Ministry Council for Patriotic Education – comprising top officials from the security apparatus, including the Defense Minister, KGB chief, and Interior Minister – was created to implement it. This programme explicitly frames schools as tools to bolster "national security" and combat perceived Western "information and political pressure" since 2020. It has led to initiatives like the formation of military and patriotic clubs in schools and universities. Under a May 2022 decree, military units and even KGB officers have been instructed to conduct extracurricular classes and drills for youth. By embedding the security forces into educational activities, the regime is

normalising a state of siege mentality among children, teaching them loyalty through military-style discipline and fear. The intended outcome is a **generation that conflates patriotism with obedience to authority and willingness to fight** perceived enemies of the state.

Perhaps most disturbingly, Belarus and Russia are now explicitly coordinating these ideological efforts as part of their Union State integration. High-level Russian officials have called for *"complete integration into a unified cultural and ideological space"* with Belarus⁷⁵. This includes synchronising history teaching and even creating unified history textbooks for Russia and Belarus. In 2023, a joint commission on 'historical enlightenment' was created to enforce a shared ideological narrative across Belarus and Russia. Its task is to enforce a "correct" version of historical memory across both countries.

A glaring example of Russification is the marginalization of the Belarusian language in schools. The long-term trend of replacing Belarusian with Russian in education has accelerated. By the 2020–2021 school year, only 10.2% of Belarusian primary and secondary students were taught in Belarusian; the rest studied exclusively in Russian⁷⁶. (Just five years earlier, 13% learned in Belarusian, so the share was already low and dropping.) At the vocational and university level, virtually all instruction is in Russian. Lukashenka's government has thus nearly achieved the goal of linguistic homogenization under Russian dominance. In September 2022, Lukashenka openly ordered the closure of "anti-state" private schools – many of which used Belarusian as a medium – making clear that only institutions guaranteeing the "correct ideological narrative" would be allowed. The erosion of Belarusian language and culture in education diminishes the soft power of the EU and its member states, which often supported Belarusian-language and cultural initiatives as part of a pluralistic identity. It also paves the way for Russian narratives to face fewer local cultural barriers.

The implications of this indoctrination campaign reach beyond Belarus' borders. A generation of Belarusians is being taught to view democracy and

73. *Education serves the regime. The ideologisation and militarisation of the Belarusian education system, OSW, 2023.*

74. *Education serves the regime. The ideologisation and militarisation of the Belarusian education system, OSW, 2023.*

75. *Belarus and Russia Aim for Complete Integration into a Unified Cultural and Ideological Space, Belarus in Focus, , 2024.*

76. *Education serves the regime. The ideologisation and militarisation of the Belarusian education system, OSW, 2023.*

Western institutions with suspicion or outright hostility, while glorifying authoritarian “stability” and Russian-led integration. *EU soft power among Belarusian youth is eroding* as a result. Only one-third of Belarusians now report a positive image of the EU (versus 16% negative, with the rest neutral)⁷⁷, and for those fed a steady diet of propaganda, the EU is increasingly painted as a destabilising force or “geopolitical competitor”⁷⁸. The Russian-Ukrainian war, in which the Kremlin’s narrative dominates Belarusian state media, has further amplified anti-Western messaging, portraying NATO and the EU as aggressors and justifying Russia’s actions as protection of the “Motherland”⁷⁹. For instance, in May 2024 Belarusian schools were instructed to show a video address by a Russian Orthodox cleric in Minsk that praised Russian soldiers in Ukraine for “fighting for our peace” and drew parallels to the Soviet fight against Nazi Germany. Such propaganda equates Western support for Ukraine with Nazism, a deeply inflammatory message aimed at youth.

All these trends point to a profound battle for the hearts and minds of Belarusian youth, with the authoritarian regime (abetted by Russia) on one side and democratic values on the other. The more successful Lukashenko is in indoctrinating young people, the harder it will be to integrate a future free Belarus with Europe, and the more likely that Belarus will remain a security threat as a forward post for Russian influence. It is therefore in the EU’s strategic interest to counter this indoctrination and keep the channels of independent information and education open to Belarusians. Failing to do so could result in a lost generation that is estranged from Europe and disinclined to pursue democratic change.

Erosion of EU Influence and Growing Russian Leverage

The coercive isolation of Belarusian youth from Western contacts has led to a worrying erosion of EU soft power in Belarus and a concomitant increase in Russian ideological leverage. Over the past few years, Belarus’ official ties with Europe have been severed or frozen due to the regime’s actions, drastically reducing the EU’s direct engagement with Belarusian society. In June 2021, the Belarusian authorities suspended the country’s participation in the EU’s Eastern Partnership (EaP), a framework that had facilitated people-to-people

exchanges, educational programmes, and dialogue with the EU. Consequently, many EU-sponsored initiatives – from youth exchanges to civil society projects – had to be reconfigured to operate in exile, if at all. Visa facilitation agreements were partially suspended, and Belarus’ state institutions cut off cooperation, limiting opportunities for young Belarusians to travel to or study in Europe through official channels.

Within Belarus, the regime’s information crackdown has greatly narrowed the influence of European media and culture. All major independent news outlets, including those with pro-European orientations, have been banned or driven out (often labelled “extremist”). EU institutions should reorient their communication strategy to reach Belarusian youth through exile-based digital media and secure access to alternative narratives, using tools like *EUvsDisinfo*. The state now monopolizes the information space, broadcasting a narrative closely aligned with Kremlin talking points. Russian state media content is pervasive on Belarusian TV and online platforms, filling the void left by the silenced independent Belarusian voices. Young people, who are heavy internet users, find popular social media and news sites blocked or branded as extremist if they carry dissenting content. For example, the regime has designated even apolitical platforms like certain Telegram channels and the websites of youth groups like RADA as “extremist,” deterring youth from accessing them. This drives many to rely on Russian social networks and media for information, where Kremlin influence is strong.

The result is that Russian narratives increasingly shape the worldview of Belarusian youth, while European perspectives are marginalised. Despite polling limits, surveys suggest that pro-Russian sentiment remains significant, especially given the state propaganda barrage. In contrast, pro-European sentiment, while still present, is largely confined to circles with access to independent media (often via VPN or in exile). Anecdotally, some Belarusian youth – even those who have spent time in the EU – express ambivalence, saying life in the West is “over-hyped” and indicating they might prefer to return to Belarus if only economic conditions improved⁸⁰. Such views reflect the subtle effectiveness of propaganda that emphasises material stability and paints Western democracy as chaotic.

79. *Belarus: the indoctrination of minors is rising in scale and taking on new forms, EU vs Disinfo, 2024.*

80. *Building The New Elite Of Belarus – In Lithuania, Worldcrunch, 2014.*

It must be stressed that not all is lost in terms of European appeal. The very fact that tens of thousands of young Belarusians chose EU countries as their refuge indicates a reservoir of goodwill and aspiration toward Europe. Many youth in Belarus remain quietly pro-European or at least curious about Europe, but they currently lack avenues to experience it. The EU's cultural and educational influence can still be felt indirectly – for instance, through the Belarusian diaspora's social media, or through clandestine use of VPNs to watch YouTube bloggers. Yet the longer the isolation persists, the greater the risk that a new normal sets in where young Belarusians see Russia as their primary (or sole) partner and the EU as irrelevant or antagonistic.

From a strategic standpoint, the “battle of narratives” in Belarus is a microcosm of the wider contest between democratic and authoritarian models in Eastern Europe. If the EU cedes the informational and cultural space entirely to Moscow and Minsk, it may find down the line that Belarusian society, especially the new generation, has shifted firmly into the Kremlin's orbit in terms of identity and alignment. This would entrench an authoritarian buffer state on the EU's frontier, hostile to European values and possibly willing to be used in aggression against neighbours (as we saw when Lukashenka allowed Russian troops to use Belarus as a staging ground against Ukraine in 2022). Conversely, if the EU can maintain or rebuild its soft-power engagement (through education, culture, and communication), it keeps alive the prospect of a future Belarus that looks westward and embraces reform.

In summary, Russian influence is exploiting the void left by reduced Western engagement, aiming to “suffocate” Belarus' distinct identity and align it wholly with Russia. European policymakers should treat this as a warning sign. The credibility of the EU and its values in the eyes of Belarusian youth needs bolstering through visible support and outreach, even if direct cooperation with the Belarusian state is impossible under current conditions.

Economic and Security Implications of Youth Repression

Youth repression harms both the economy and security. A nation that drives out or suppresses its young talent is sabotaging its own future. For Belarus, the loss of so many educated young people and the stifling of education and innovation will likely result in long-term economic decline, increased dependency on foreign powers, and potential social instability – all of which are concerning from a European security perspective.

Internally, Belarus faces a brewing demographic and economic crisis. With an ageing population and now a drained pool of young workers, the country's productivity and growth potential are plummeting. Official data show that Belarus' workforce numbered about 4.3 million in 2020 but had fallen to just over 4.2 million two years later⁸¹.

This weakened economy has a domino effect on security. **First**, it makes the Belarusian state more financially dependent on Russia and other external lenders. Already, Russia has provided loans and subsidies to keep Lukashenka's government solvent amid sanctions and stagnation. With fewer young taxpayers and entrepreneurs, Minsk will lean even more on Moscow for support, potentially trading bits of sovereignty (such as control over strategic industries or even military basing rights) in return. An economically vassalised Belarus is likely to be a pliant tool for Kremlin foreign policy – a clear risk factor for Europe.

Second, widespread youth unemployment or underemployment (for those who neither flee nor are allowed to flourish) could lead to social unrest and desperation. While open protest is near impossible under current repression, there is a danger that as economic conditions deteriorate, some youths might be driven into illicit activities or radical opposition. The regime's practice of criminalising even mild dissent leaves no legal outlet for grievances. The combination of economic malaise and harsh political repression can be volatile in the long term, possibly resulting in sudden destabilization or violence. Any abrupt crisis in Belarus – whether economic collapse or political upheaval – would have direct spillover effects on neighbouring EU states (through refugee flows, security vacuum, etc.).

81. *A depopulating country. Belarus's demographic situation, OSW, 2023.*

Third, the brain drain represents a loss of human capital for the entire region, not just Belarus. Young Belarusians are now contributing their talents elsewhere instead of in their homeland. In the short term, countries like Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia benefit from an influx of skilled Belarusian workers and students, which can indeed boost those economies. However, this benefit is tempered by integration challenges and the trauma many of these exiles carry. Moreover, these young people often hope to return to a free Belarus one day; if that prospect dims with time, Europe could end up with a semi-permanent displaced community that struggles with identity and purpose. On the flip side, if conditions do change in Belarus down the line, the expectation will be that many expatriates return home, which could suddenly deprive EU economies of a cohort of workers. Planning for such scenarios is complex.

Finally, the opportunity cost of youth repression is immense. Instead of contributing to positive developments – startups, cultural exchanges,

scientific research – Belarus' brightest minds are either languishing in jail or channelled into survival mode. The region loses out on potential cross-border collaboration and innovation that a free, engaged Belarusian youth could bring. For example, prior to 2020, Belarusian IT firms were increasingly partnering with EU companies, and students participated in Erasmus+ programmes and regional youth forums. All that goodwill and connectivity have been interrupted. The longer this continues, the harder it will be to rebuild those networks.

In essence, the suppression of Belarus' youth is economically self-defeating for Belarus and creates a more brittle state that is a security wildcard on Europe's border. It is in the EU's interest to mitigate these economic implications by supporting Belarusian talent and keeping it engaged (even if outside Belarus for now), thereby preserving the human capital needed to reconstruct a post-authoritarian Belarus and maintaining stability in the interim.



05. Youth as Agents of Democratic Change and Resilience

Amid these challenges, it is important to recognise that Belarusian youth are not merely passive victims or a “lost generation.” They have demonstrated remarkable resilience, creativity, and commitment to democratic values, offering hope that with support, they can drive positive change. Tapping into this potential is crucial for the future security and prosperity of Belarus and the wider European region.

The 2020 protests themselves were a testament to the courage and democratic aspirations of Belarus’ young people. Students and recent graduates formed the core of many protest marches, and youth-led initiatives (from creative street art to flash mobs) energised the movement. Although the regime crushed the protests, it could not extinguish the desire for a freer society among the young. In the underground and in exile, Belarusian youth have continued to organise. They are adapting tactics, using encrypted communications and diaspora networks to maintain activism. As the Council of Europe’s Youth Department observed in a 2023 workshop, *“the youth in Belarus has never experienced democracy and is living in constant fear of persecution,”* yet young Belarusians “are constantly finding new ways to associate, meet, exchange, and disrupt with their creativity” despite the multifaceted challenges⁸². This resilience – the ability to self-organise even under extreme repression – is a key asset for any future democratic opening.

The burgeoning **Belarusian diaspora youth community in Europe** is increasingly organised and engaged. In EU countries like Lithuania, Poland, and Germany, exiled Belarusian students and young professionals have formed associations, NGOs, and media projects to both support their compatriots and keep attention on Belarus. For instance, the Belarusian National Youth Council RADA, after being banned at home, continues to operate from abroad, coordinating youth NGOs and advocating internationally for Belarusian youth rights. These networks are natural allies for EU-funded youth initiatives, and should be integrated into programmes like Erasmus+, EU4Youth, and Council of Europe youth dialogues. Similarly, the Belarusian Students’ Association has reconstituted in exile to document academic

repression and assist displaced students. These groups serve as the institutional memory and backbone of civil society in exile, preserving a pro-democracy Belarusian identity and passing down organizational skills to younger activists.

Education remains a critical front. Supported by European partners, Belarusian educators have set up avenues for students to continue learning free from indoctrination. The most notable example is the European Humanities University (EHU) in Vilnius – a Belarusian liberal arts university in exile. EHU, which was forced out of Minsk in 2004 by Lukashenka, has since become a hub for Belarusian youth to obtain a quality education in a democratic environment. As of the early 2020s, EHU enrolls about 1,800 students – 95% of them from Belarus – with funding from the EU and other donors to cover scholarships and operations. These students are being trained in critical thinking and civic engagement, nurtured as a future “new elite” for a post-Lukashenka Belarus. Many express a desire to return home once things change for the better. By investing in such institutions, Europe is quite literally building the capacity for democratic renewal. The presence of thousands of Belarusian youth studying in European universities (beyond EHU as well) means there is a growing pool of young people familiar with European values, languages, and best practices – an invaluable resource for transforming Belarus when the opportunity arises.

Belarusian youth have also shown innovative forms of resistance and civic participation that strengthen regional security. A striking example is the group of Belarusian *“Cyber Partisans,”* many of whom are young IT specialists, who in 2021–2022 carried out cyber-sabotage against regime databases and the railway system used by Russian troops. Their actions, though clandestine, demonstrated a commitment to hindering authoritarian repression and Russian military movements. Additionally, hundreds of Belarusian volunteers – a significant number of them young men and women – joined the fight on Ukraine’s side against the Russian invasion, forming units like the Kastus Kalinouski Regiment. These volunteers view the defense of Ukraine as intrinsically linked to the freedom of Belarus. Their bravery and combat experience could translate into a powerful

82. *A youth agenda for democracy and human rights in Belarus, Council of Europe, 2025.*

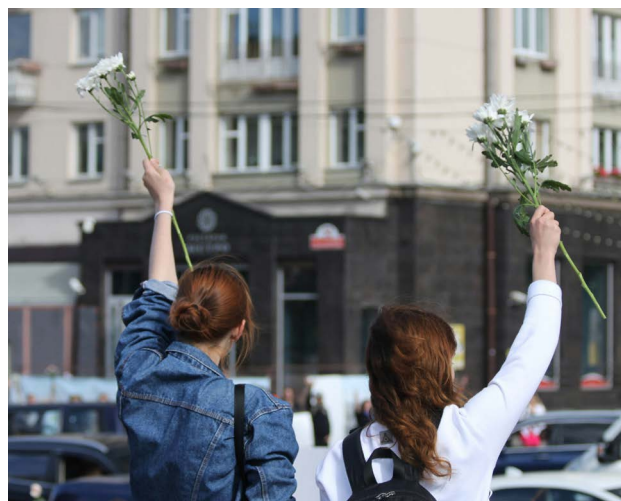
pro-democracy force in Belarus in the future. The existence of such elements shows that a segment of Belarusian youth is willing to risk life and limb for the cause of freedom in Eastern Europe.

In the cultural sphere, exiled Belarusian youth are active in preserving and promoting the Belarusian language, arts, and historical memory, countering the regime's russification efforts. They organise cultural festivals, publish books and zines in Belarusian, and run YouTube channels and podcasts from abroad. This cultural resilience is essential – it keeps alive the idea of a Belarusian national identity distinct from the authoritarian narrative, one aligned with European heritage. For example, diaspora youth groups have created online libraries of banned Belarusian literature and facilitate virtual discussions that connect young people inside and outside the country. These efforts help Belarusian youth maintain a sense of community and purpose, reducing the atomization that the regime tries to impose.

Importantly, Belarusian youth activists and opposition figures are engaging with international institutions to keep Belarus on the agenda. Young Belarusian voices were present in forums like the EU's Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (until Belarus' official suspension) and continue to appear in side-events around the United Nations and OSCE. The newly established United Nations Youth Office and various EU youth platforms

have been urged to include Belarusian youth representatives in dialogues⁸³. This not only empowers the Belarusian youth with advocacy experience, but also ensures the international community hears directly from those affected. The European Youth Forum, for instance, passed a resolution in late 2023 calling for the protection of Belarusian young political prisoners and greater international support for Belarusian youth activists. Such advocacy is slowly bearing fruit: the Council of Europe in 2024 launched a dedicated project "Democratic Participation with Belarusian Youth Civil Society," which brings together exiled Belarusian youth leaders and European stakeholders⁸⁴. This kind of engagement treats Belarusian youth not just as beneficiaries of aid but as partners in shaping their country's future.

In sum, Belarusian youth have shown that they are *not giving up*. Despite the repression, they remain one of the most pro-change demographics in the country. Their energy and ingenuity continue to manifest in various forms – educational pursuit, digital activism, cultural preservation, and even armed resistance against tyranny. These are exactly the qualities needed to eventually rebuild Belarus as a democratic, sovereign nation integrated into the European family. For the EU, nurturing these qualities through sustained support is an investment with potentially enormous returns: a future ally in place of a current adversary at Europe's border.



83. *The protection of youth rights and support of young political prisoners of Belarus, Youth Forum, 2023.*

84. *A youth agenda for democracy and human rights in Belarus, Council of Europe, 2025.*

06. Why EU Engagement is a Strategic Necessity

Supporting Belarusian youth is an investment in the EU's strategic future, democratic resilience, and border security. The trajectory of Belarus, a country geographically and geopolitically wedged between the EU and Russia, will significantly influence the security landscape of Eastern Europe. Belarusian youth will determine that trajectory: they are the ones who will shape what Belarus looks like 10, 20, 30 years from now. Ensuring that this generation is not lost to repression, indoctrination, or emigration is therefore crucial for building a stable, democratic Eastern Europe.

From a security perspective, a Belarus that continues on its current path – autocratic, depopulating, and becoming an appendage of Russia – poses multiple risks to the EU. It gives Russia a platform for military provocations, hybrid warfare, and regional destabilisation.

Belarusian youth are the linchpin of this equation. They are the most likely to support and carry out a democratic transition – indeed, many in this cohort have already demonstrated their commitment to democratic ideals in 2020 and beyond. They are also the ones who would rebuild the country's institutions, economy, and international relationships in a post-Lukashenka scenario. Engaging with them now means empowering the agents of change for when a political opening occurs. Historical precedents in Central and Eastern Europe show that opposition movements and youth networks supported during authoritarian times became the leadership of democratic transitions (for example, the role of student movements and young dissidents in the Baltic States and Poland in the 1980s). The EU's support to civil society and youth in those contexts paid dividends when communism fell. Belarus could follow a similar pattern, but only if the groundwork is laid in advance.

Moreover, engaging with Belarusian youth now helps to mitigate immediate security concerns. For instance, providing Belarusian students and researchers opportunities in the EU can reduce the risk of their recruitment by hostile intelligence or extremist groups born of desperation. Offering

paths for legal migration and study undermines the Lukashenka regime's leverage when it tries to weaponise migrants. Keeping young Belarusians connected to Europe also counters the Kremlin's narrative that the West has abandoned them or is their enemy. This psychological aspect is key: if youths feel Europe cares, they are less susceptible to propaganda.

It is also a way to uphold European values in practice. The EU has repeatedly declared support for the Belarusian people's democratic aspirations in various resolutions and statements. By focusing on youth, the EU targets the demographic that can sustain those aspirations into the future. This is fully in line with EU values and international commitments, such as UN resolutions on youth, peace, and security, which emphasise the positive role of youth in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Lastly, there is a moral and reputational component. The brutality inflicted on young protesters and students in Belarus shocked Europe's public conscience. European policymakers have a duty, as guardians of human rights norms, to respond in concrete ways. Failure to do so could embolden not only the Belarus regime but other authoritarian regimes by signalling that repression of youth and civil society will be met only with words, not actions. Conversely, strong engagement and support for Belarusian youth would signal to other struggling pro-democracy movements in the region that Europe stands by its principles.

In brief, EU engagement with Belarusian youth aligns practical security interests with the union's core values. It is an investment in a more secure neighbourhood: one where countries are democratic, respect human rights, and cooperate peacefully with the EU. Ignoring the Belarusian youth now would likely mean paying a higher price later – whether in managing a larger refugee crisis, confronting a Belarus that hosts Russian nuclear weapons, or contending with the fallout of a societal collapse next door. Proactive engagement is the smarter and safer strategy.

Recommendations:

To capitalize on the opportunities and address the risks outlined, the European Union, in concert with international partners like the UN, Council of Europe, OSCE, and others, should implement a coordinated strategy of support for Belarusian youth. The following are actionable, evidence-based recommendations:

01

Scale up Erasmus+, EU4Youth, and educational access:

Launch or expand scholarship and academic exchange programmes specifically targeted at Belarusian youth. This includes funding more spots for Belarusians in Erasmus+ and national scholarship schemes across EU member states. Create opportunities for short-term study visits or summer schools in Europe for Belarusian students (including those still in Belarus, via safe third countries) to expose them to democratic values and critical thinking.

02

Support independent learning and information access:

Given the indoctrination in Belarus' schools, the EU should support alternative sources of knowledge. This could involve funding online learning platforms and courses that Belarusian youth can access securely, covering topics like history, civics, and media literacy from a factual, pluralistic perspective. Partner with NGOs to distribute (digitally or through exile networks) uncensored textbooks and literature to students in Belarus, countering the regime's disinformation with truthful material. Strengthen VPN and internet freedom initiatives so young Belarusians can bypass censorship and reach independent media. The EU's East StratCom Task Force (which runs EUvsDisinfo) should intensify efforts to debunk propaganda targeted at Belarusian audiences, possibly creating youth-friendly content or formats.

03

Bolster youth civil society and networks:

Provide direct support (financial, technical, and moral) to Belarusian youth organizations in exile and, where feasible, underground networks inside Belarus. The European Endowment for Democracy and similar instruments should offer grants to youth-led projects that promote civic engagement, human rights documentation, cultural preservation, and community building among Belarusians. Facilitate the operation of the Belarusian National Youth Council RADA in exile and help it connect with European youth platforms for visibility and partnership. Encourage the inclusion of Belarusian youth representatives in international forums – for example, invite them as observers or special guests to European Youth Parliament sessions, Council of Europe youth meetings, OSCE Human Dimension events, etc., to ensure their perspectives are heard and to validate their efforts.

04

Ease mobility and legal stay:

EU Member States should simplify visa and residency procedures for young Belarusians who have been persecuted or seek to study/travel in the EU. This may include special humanitarian visa mechanisms or expanded use of Poland's "Poland Business Harbour" program (initially created to attract IT talent from Belarus) across the EU. Maintaining avenues for legal migration will counter the Belarus regime's attempts to seal its youth in. At the same time, coordination with countries like Poland and Lithuania is needed to resolve bureaucratic hurdles (e.g., diploma recognition issues caused by Minsk's non-cooperation). The EU could establish a task force to work with academic institutions and ministries in Member States to accept alternative documentation or conditional enrollment for Belarusian students who cannot obtain papers due to regime obstruction.

05

Facilitate economic empowerment and brain circulation:

To address the brain drain in a way that benefits both Belarusian youth and EU economies, develop programs that integrate young Belarusian professionals into European job markets while preserving their connection to Belarus. This could involve mentorship and internship schemes in European companies for Belarusian graduates, EU-funded incubators for Belarusian-led startups in exile, and networking events linking the Belarusian IT diaspora with EU tech firms. The goal is twofold: help these youth build careers (so they don't fall into poverty or exploitation abroad) and enable them to acquire skills and resources that can later be invested in Belarus' reconstruction. Additionally, consider supporting "brain circulation" initiatives – for example, allow exiled Belarusian academics and experts to lead joint research or development projects that involve collaborators inside Belarus (where possible) or in the diaspora, keeping intellectual ties active.

06

Counter indoctrination and preserve identity:

The EU and Member States should quietly support efforts to maintain the Belarusian language and independent cultural identity among youth. This could be achieved by funding Belarusian-language media (radio, podcasts, YouTube content) aimed at young audiences, produced by exiled journalists and creators. It could also include scholarships specifically for studying the Belarusian language, history, and culture in European universities, creating a cadre of experts who can later help rebuild the education system on democratic lines. Partnering with UNESCO and the Council of Europe, the EU can raise issues of **cultural rights and education freedom** in Belarus at international fora, spotlighting the regime's violations, such as the russification of schools and the closure of minority language institutions (e.g., Polish-language schools). Keeping these issues in the international eye puts pressure on Minsk and validates the importance of cultural resilience efforts.

07

Provide psychosocial support and ensure community building:

Recognising the trauma many Belarusian youth have endured, from torture in prisons to the stress of forced migration, the EU should support programs for mental health and community integration. This might mean funding counselling and trauma-informed services for exiled youth, as well as creating youth centres or hubs in cities with large Belarusian communities to serve as safe spaces for networking and cultural activities. Such measures help prevent the alienation and disaffection that can come from displacement. They also prepare these young people to be well-adjusted leaders in the future, rather than a lost generation.

08

Promote international justice and accountability:

Work with international partners to ensure that crimes against young Belarusians do not go unnoticed or unpunished. The EU has already imposed sanctions on Belarusian officials responsible for repression; it should continue updating and expanding these lists, including those involved in educational indoctrination and persecution of students. Support the UN Special Rapporteur's mandate and the ongoing evidence-gathering initiatives (like the UN Human Rights Council's examination of Belarus) focusing on abuses such as torture of young prisoners. This is important not only for eventual justice but also as a deterrent, signalling to the regime's enforcers that the world is watching their treatment of youth. The European Parliament has even called for exploring international prosecution of regime leaders for crimes against humanity; keeping this on the table underscores that gross violations are a security issue, not a purely domestic one.

09

Prepare a plan for the future – Comprehensive Plan for Belarus:

prepare all what is necessary for the activation of the developed by the EU a Comprehensive Plan for Belarus that can be activated when political change begins in Belarus. By starting the realisation of the possible actions in this plan now and by raising the topic of the plan the EU provides hope to Belarusian youth that there is something to strive for. It tells them: *"We are ready to help you rebuild when the time comes."* Knowing that a support structure will be in place can empower more young people to push for change, including those still within the state or state-owned bodies (young professionals in government or state enterprises who might become key reformers).

10

Coordinate with like-minded partners:

The EU should lead a coordinated international effort – involving the G7, international financial institutions, and organizations like *the Council of Europe, OSCE, and UN agencies* – to support Belarusian youth. The Council of Europe, for example, despite Belarus not being a member, has shown a willingness to engage with Belarusian civil society and youth in exile. Joint programs could amplify impact, such as co-organised trainings for young Belarusian activists or co-funded youth initiatives. The OSCE could be urged to revive scholarship schemes or internships for youth from repressive regimes (something it did in the 1990s for post-Soviet states). A multi-partner trust fund could be established to pool resources for Belarus-specific youth support projects, ensuring sustainability even in a protracted crisis.

Implementing these recommendations will require dedicated resources and political will, but the cost is small compared to the stakes involved. The future of Belarus is now being shaped by the minds and decisions of its youth. By acting on these fronts, the EU and its partners can help steer that future towards democracy, stability, and alignment with the European family of nations.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this Red Paper underscores a critical reality: Europe's security is intrinsically linked to the future political trajectory of Belarus. Under the current regime, Belarus remains a significant risk factor, continuously exploited by Russia to destabilize the region and undermine European cohesion. Yet, a democratic Belarus holds immense potential to strengthen European security through strategic cooperation, resilience-building, and institutional alignment with EU norms and values.

European policy toward Belarus remains insufficiently adapted to the hybrid complexity of the Belarusian threat vector. Predominantly reactive sanctions and rhetorical condemnations have failed to systematically constrain the regime's operational capabilities or provide long-term pathways for democratic transition. Furthermore, Belarus remains marginal within most EU security planning frameworks, still primarily viewed through the prism of Russia or Ukraine, rather than as a fully autonomous strategic concern.

The policy recalibration required is not one of tactical adjustments but of structural strategic recognition. Belarus must be repositioned as a core element of EU security policy, demanding comprehensive multidimensional engagement. This should include:

Proactive isolation of the regime's military, financial, technological, and informational support structures;

Long-term investment into the governance capacity of Belarusian democratic forces in exile,

ensuring financial, organizational, and strategic sustainability;

The creation of institutional partnerships with regional actors, particularly Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic states, to coordinate on border security, hybrid threat monitoring, and shared contingency planning;

A sustained narrative shift that embeds Belarus within the EU's strategic horizon, not only as a site of repression but as a determinant of Europe's long-term security posture.

Failure to act decisively risks solidifying Belarus as a permanent operational extension of Russian power projection — a heavily militarized hybrid enclave on the EU's borders, serving as a base for sustained destabilization well beyond the current crisis cycle.

Conversely, a successful policy of proactive containment, support for democratic resilience, and long-term strategic anchoring of Belarus into European institutional structures would not only neutralize one of Russia's most effective hybrid tools but would significantly expand the EU's strategic depth, reinforce its eastern security perimeter, and strengthen democratic resilience across the region.

Ultimately, Belarus constitutes both a present hybrid threat and a future democratic opportunity. Whether Europe succeeds in managing this dual challenge will be a defining indicator of its capacity to strategically shape its own security environment in an increasingly contested geopolitical landscape.



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