



5TH CONFERENCE OF THE BELARUSIAN DIASPORA

 May 01-02

 Warsaw

Outcomes



СВЯТЛАНА
ЦІХАНОУСКАЯ
ОФІС



Народныя амбасады
Беларусі



Аб'яднаны
Пераходны
Кабінет
Беларусі



Каардынацыйная
Рада



Офіс
Дэмакратычных
Сіл Беларусі
Чэская Рэспубліка



Офіс
Дэмакратычных
Сіл Беларусі
Эстонія - Латвія



ПРАДСТАЎНІЦТВА
ПА НАЦЫЯНАЛЬНЫМ АДРАДЖЭННІ



“Who Are We: Belarusians Abroad, Belarusians Worldwide, Diaspora, or a National Minority?”

Moderator:

Alena Shkurova / Belarusian sociologist, Doctor of Sociology, co-founder of the Belarusian Sociological Group

Speakers:

Ilona Karpiuk / Deputy Director of the Center of Belarusian Culture in Białystok

Pavel Stankevich / Chair of the Tutaka Foundation, Białystok

Mikhail Rubin / People's Embassy of Belarus in Germany

Yauheniya Valatouskaya / Klaipėda. Leader of the Belarusian community in Klaipėda, founder of the “Sea of Belarusian Ideas” organization, activist, volunteer of the People's Embassies

Sviatlana Shatsilina / Mission of Democratic Belarus in Ukraine

Nadzeya Nortan / Association of Belarusians in America



Evolution of Concepts and Models of Self-Organization

The discussion participants analyzed the current state and future of the Belarusian presence abroad. The current situation requires a clear distinction between the terms “diaspora” and “community.” A classic diaspora typically unites citizens of one country living in another state. At the same time, the concept of “community” more broadly describes those who identify with Belarusian culture, values, and civic identity. Many groups abroad define themselves precisely through this unity of values. For example, in Germany, an organized Belarusian community structure was effectively built from scratch following the events of 2020, which demonstrates that the political crisis served as a powerful catalyst for the emergence of new forms of civic engagement.

Regional Specifics and Historical Continuity

The circumstances of Belarusians living in different countries shape distinct approaches to identity. In the United States, there is perhaps the most harmonious integration of the older and newer waves of emigration. New activists have successfully built on the foundations and advocacy experience established by post-war Belarusian community leaders. A very different picture emerges in Poland and Lithuania due to the presence of longstanding Belarusian national minorities. These communities have lived on their lands for centuries and do not always share the priorities of newer political migrants. In Lithuania, the situation is further complicated by divisions between labor migrants and opponents of the current regime in Belarus. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, Belarusian identity is being tested by the realities of war. The conflict forces people to define their position clearly, according to a simple distinction: “one of us” or “one of them.”

Language Policy and Cultural Markers

The use of the Belarusian language remains one of the most debated issues within the community. For some, the language serves as the only reliable marker of identity and a safeguard against imperial influence. Others, however, argue that culture should be understood more broadly than language alone. They emphasize the importance of a national identity that can endure even when other languages are used. Forced Belarusianization within communities may alienate some people. For this reason, returning to one's native language should remain a voluntary and personal process. In this context, religion also

plays a dual role in preserving traditions. For example, in the Białystok region, Orthodox Christianity helped maintain a sense of community, but it did not always contribute to keeping the Belarusian language alive and widely used.

Forming a National Idea and Strategy for Unity

The search for a unifying idea focuses on the nation's interest in itself and pride in its principles. A unifying national idea today lies in building a modern democratic state. Such a state must respect diversity and the rights of all ethnic groups. The process of identifying as Belarusian often begins after the age of thirty or forty through the study of family history. Participants in the discussion compare the path of nation-building to a long marathon, not a short sprint. Solidarity remains the main tool for survival amid a protracted crisis. One should preserve the memory of their origins regardless of whether they have a passport or where they reside. Ultimately, the common goal is to build a free country that will be of interest both to its own citizens and to the entire world.

Pavel: *"We need to understand that Belarus and Belarusian identity are two different things. Belarusian identity will live on regardless of what happens in Belarus."*

Mikhail: *"This is, after all, a process we're all going through. And we've realized: we still have to walk this path together. This won't be a sprint. It's a marathon we have to run together — alongside the generations that came before us and rejoiced that the youth took to the streets."*

Nadzeya: *"Living here in the United States, I've come to realize this idea, and now I see it coming to life. That is, when a person is interested in themselves — what are they doing? It's the same when a nation is interested in what it does, who it is. That's why we must be interested in ourselves. That makes the whole world interested in you, because you're specifically showing your identity. It is vivid, it is natural, and it is interesting. That is why today's national idea is for Belarusians to be interested in themselves."*

Study Presentation

"Counting Belarusians Worldwide"

Speakers:

Anastasiya Svirikova / representative of the People's Embassy of Belarus in Austria

Vadim Mojeiko / Head of the Kościuszko Institute for Security Studies



Challenges of Quantitative Assessment and Identification

Determining the exact number of Belarusians abroad poses a serious analytical challenge. Official international data often relies on information from government agencies in Belarus and does not reflect the actual situation. Estimates by experts and civil society organizations range from several hundred thousand to several million people. The discrepancy in the figures stems from different approaches to defining the subject of the count. Statistics may take into account place of birth, possession of a passport, or current residence permit. However, true national identity is often based on an individual's personal choice and self-identification. Effective community engagement requires viewing statistics as a living dynamic rather than a static set of data.

Demographic Sustainability and Migration Cycles

The current wave of migration exhibits unique demographic characteristics. Unlike many other migration patterns, there is marked gender equality among Belarusians. Families often leave together, which reduces the motivation to return quickly but helps preserve national culture. Living together with loved ones allows the Belarusian language to be maintained within the home. At the same time, many Belarusians experience repeated displacement. This pattern of serial migration is driven by factors such as war, difficulties with legal status, or challenges integrating into a first country of refuge. As a result, many people find themselves moving from one country to another in search of greater security, stability, and predictability.

Geographical Transformation and Growth Hubs

The centers of concentration for Belarusian communities are constantly shifting under the influence of politics and legislation. Poland firmly maintains its position as the main hub for community formation thanks to easier legal procedures and cultural proximity. Spain is experiencing rapid growth and is becoming a new important destination for long-term settlement. In contrast, Georgia is seeing a noticeable population outflow and the closure of Belarusian spaces. Difficulties in obtaining documents are forcing Belarusians to leave this region, despite its initial accessibility. The year 2026 is expected to be a turning point for the final settlement of migrants in their new locations. The transition from addressing day-to-day challenges to long-term planning will open new opportunities for business and cultural development.

Language Sovereignty and Strengthening Identity

The question of using one's native language has become a central element of civic identity. The political crisis of recent years has encouraged many Belarusians to make a conscious shift toward using the Belarusian language in their daily lives. Participants in the discussion noted that the language has become an effective means of protecting national identity in the face of external pressure. At the same time, contemporary Belarusian culture is making the use of the native language more appealing and relevant for younger generations. Many Belarusians forced into exile seek to preserve their distinct identity rather than simply assimilate into their new environments. They want to remain fully Belarusian while actively participating in the life of their communities and maintaining ties with their homeland. Regular gatherings and joint initiatives help strengthen these connections, fostering a greater sense of unity and enabling Belarusians to act as a more visible and organized community on the international stage.

Vadim: *“At the same time, I also hear stories from friends who are still in Belarus about how the opportunity to communicate with clients in Belarusian at work has become, in some cases, one of the last remaining ways for them to express their civic position. They may no longer be able to go out with a slogan or a flag. That is why I would like to quote my friend — and the friend of many people in this room — Pavel Belavus, who unfortunately remains behind bars: ‘When they take away our flag, we raise our language.’ The Belarusian language has always been, and remains, something that has faced pressure not only from the current regime but for centuries under the Russian Empire. Yet the language has survived.”*

Presentations of Successful Diaspora Practices (Part 1)

Moderator:

Vitaliy Malchanau / Representative of the Democratic Forces of Belarus in Estonia and Latvia

Speakers:

Lithuania, Klaipėda. Alena Volkava / Representative of the People's Embassy of Belarus in Lithuania, volunteer of "Sea of Belarusian Ideas". "From Initiative to Regular Activity of Belarusians in Klaipėda: Summary of 2022–2026"

Italy. Yuliya Yukhno / Head of the Belarusian Community Centre in Italy, representative of the People's Embassy of Belarus in Italy. "The Belarusian Cause in Italy: Italian Rhythm, Belarusian Style"

Georgia. Seviaryn Kviatkouski / "Aksyarodak' in Batumi — a Hub for Meetings of Belarusians from the Homeland and Across the World"

Germany. Maryia Rudz / "5 years of Razam in Germany: Achievements and Successes"

Czechia. Aliksandr Parshankou / Belarusian Students in Czechia (Bělaruské studentstvo ČR, z.s.). "On Belarusian Students in Czechia: Formally and Informally"

Sweden. Viktoriya Valkovich / "Specifics of Community Work in a Country with a Small Belarusian Population"



Models of Organizational Development and Legal Status

Belarusian communities abroad are undergoing a phase of active transformation from spontaneous associations into sustainable institutions. In Italy, Belarusian activists have established a multi-level structure for representing national interests. This system includes the People's Embassy for diplomatic work and the Belarusian Democratic Community Center for political advocacy. The Talaka Charitable Association successfully implements humanitarian programs and maintains a shelter for Belarusians in need. It is noteworthy that funding for social projects in Italy comes from local foundations, which refutes rumors of hidden sources of income. Meanwhile, in Klaipėda, Lithuania, the community has evolved from a volunteer group into an officially registered organization. It was this registration that allowed activists to establish direct dialogue with the city municipality and secure support for their initiatives. These examples prove that formal status becomes a key prerequisite for effective engagement with government agencies in host countries.

Advocacy and Political Influence

The political activities of Belarusian associations abroad focus on defending the rights of fellow Belarusians and raising awareness among local policymakers and institutions. In Germany, the Razam Association has established close cooperation with the Bundestag and relevant federal ministries. It has been recognized as an important partner in official parliamentary resolutions. Belarusian activists in Germany have also helped launch a broad coalition against transnational repression. In the Czech Republic, Belarusian students successfully advocated for a partial exemption from the visa ban for scholarship recipients. This achievement was made possible through sustained media engagement and the organization of large public demonstrations. At the same time, the Belarusian diaspora in Sweden faces a highly restrictive migration policy. The vast majority of Belarusian asylum seekers initially receive negative decisions from Swedish authorities. As a result, activists must continually provide expertise and country-specific information to migration services in order to improve their understanding of the situation in Belarus and influence decision-making.

Preserving Identity and Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural initiatives serve as the foundation for fostering community cohesion and creating a positive national image. In Georgia, the Aksiarodak Center offers a comprehensive infrastructure, including a kindergarten and a school with a Belarusian curriculum. This space allows families to preserve their national identity even in long-term emigration. In Germany, large-scale festivals of contemporary culture and traditional celebrations are held regularly, attracting hundreds of participants. At the same time, Belarusian students in the Czech Republic are actively fostering historical continuity, drawing on the legacy of Francysk Skaryna. In Italy, the Community Center organizes local language courses to accelerate the integration of migrants into their new society. Such projects help strengthen horizontal ties between representatives of different waves of migration. National symbols, such as the white-red-white flag, are openly used in Georgia as a sign of solidarity and security.

Security Challenges and Resource Constraints

The activities of Belarusian NGOs are fraught with serious risks and practical difficulties. The Swedish diaspora experienced a severe crisis following the arrest of its treasurer during her trip to Belarus. This incident led to a temporary exodus of members and required a radical overhaul of security protocols. Furthermore, activists in many countries suffer from emotional burnout and a shortage of human resources. In the Czech Republic, a student association operates exclusively on a volunteer basis without external funding. In Germany, the community's work is complicated by a general rise in anti-immigrant sentiment and shifting political conditions. Moreover, the Italian bureaucratic system is characterized by an extremely slow pace of work, which slows down legal procedures for Belarusians. Despite external pressure and internal problems, the communities continue to build their capacity and develop new forms of solidarity.

Maryia: *“There is a “For a Democratic Belarus” group in the German Bundestag, with whom we are always in contact. We hold briefings for politicians on the situation in Belarus at both the federal and state levels. We also hold roundtables with ministries on issues related to legal stay and passports of Belarusians. And I am proud that Razam is mentioned in the Bundestag’s resolution on Belarus as an organization worthy of attention and support.”*

Aliaksandr: *“A major achievement, which is very important to me and to all of us, is that we managed, together with our colleagues, to partially lift the visa ban in the Czech Republic. Because after the war began, sanctions were imposed, and Belarusians still do not have the opportunity to obtain visas. And so, thanks to the fact that we have become somewhat institutionalized and visible, an exception was made: students who have Czech government scholarships or EU scholarships are still allowed to come here.”*

Yuliya: *“For example, we offer Italian language courses thanks to Natallia Dulina, who agreed to teach them for us. We’re also working to strengthen international cooperation — that is, we’re collaborating with universities and students, and through Italian students we’re sharing what Belarus is all about. And this is also very important — so that Italy understands the context of what is happening here.”*

Presentations of Successful Diaspora Practices (Part 2)

Moderator:

Vitaliy Malchanau / Representative of the Democratic Forces of Belarus in Estonia and Latvia

Speakers:

Slovenia. Aliaksandra Mamayeva / Representative of the People's Embassy in Slovenia. "How to Open a Bank Account in Any EU Country?"

USA. Nadzeya Nortan / Representative of the Association of Belarusians in America. "Belarusian America: In Action!"

Austria. Alisa Ryzhychenka / "From Legal Status and Cultural Diplomacy to Economic Integration through Education and Business Support"

Spain / "Recognition of Expired Belarusian Passports: The Experience of Belarusians in Spain"

France. Katsiaryna Bauré / "Belarusians in France: Self-Organization, Solidarity, and Cultural Diplomacy"

Poland. Uladzimir Bulauski / "Cultural Management in Exile: Working with Institutions in Łódź"

Yury Ziankovich / Lawyer, former political prisoner. Leader of the "Belarusians Who Act" list for the Coordination Council. "Belarus: From a System of Hostage-Taking to Subjectivity"



Legal Protection and Overcoming Financial Isolation

Belarusians living abroad often face unjustified refusals from banks to open or maintain accounts. Financial institutions typically justify these decisions by citing sanctions-related concerns or anti-money laundering risks. However, effective rights protection is based on European legislation governing access to basic payment accounts. This legal framework guarantees access to banking services for anyone with a legal right of residence in an EU member state. Systematic advocacy efforts also involve working with equality bodies and ombudspersons to challenge discrimination based on nationality. Bank managers can be held personally accountable for unlawful refusals, making it possible to successfully appeal such decisions. As a result, knowledge of the law and careful documentation of every refusal have become some of the most important tools available to the Belarusian community.

Institutional Support and Legal Stay in Europe

Experience in Austria demonstrates the importance of a professional approach to each case of seeking international protection. The People's Embassy was able to secure the issuance of documents with a validity period exceeding that of a national passport. In Spain, Belarusian activists have successfully implemented a mechanism for recognizing expired documents for legal procedures. This approach is based on the experience of migrants from Venezuela and requires close coordination with government ministries. Issues with obtaining criminal record certificates are being resolved through personal declarations. Regional communities in various provinces are joining forces to create unified guidelines for interacting with the police. Active engagement with ombudspersons helps overcome bureaucratic barriers in the most complex cases.

Cultural Diplomacy and Educational Strategies

The Belarusian Association in America serves as a model of successfully uniting people around shared values. Large-scale projects, such as the national flag's journey across the continent, raise the nation's profile around the world. Sports initiatives and literary projects in the native language strengthen internal ties within the community. In Poland, cultural integration takes place through the active use

of local venues and universities. Advertising events in the language of the host country attracts a local audience and breaks down cultural isolation. Educational projects for adults enable Belarusian professionals to successfully integrate into the new economy. Specialized schools provide free training in modern technologies, laying the foundation for future development.

Solidarity and Regional Cooperation

The French experience highlights the importance of self-organization in a highly centralized state. Belarusians have built mutual support networks that provide legal translation services and assistance with administrative procedures. Successful cases of obtaining French citizenship without a valid Belarusian passport have established important legal precedents. Belarusian communities have also developed specialized rehabilitation programs for the children and families of political prisoners. Close cooperation with Ukrainian initiatives has strengthened regional solidarity in the context of the ongoing war. Promoters of Belarusian culture have succeeded in incorporating elements of national heritage into educational programs, while direct engagement with local authorities has helped address social support issues more effectively and respond to community needs in a timely manner.

Geopolitical Agency and Prospects for Return

The Belarusian issue is an integral part of both European and global security. Long-term stability in the region is difficult to imagine without a free and democratic Belarus. The Belarusian diaspora should be seen not as a petitioner, but as a full-fledged partner of international institutions and governments. The central challenge remains the dismantling of the system of repression and persecution inside the country. The expertise, networks, and relationships built by Belarusians abroad are laying the groundwork for future democratic change. Business leaders and civic activists alike are increasingly viewed as part of a shared effort to advance Belarus's national renewal. Ultimately, the goal is to create the conditions that will allow all Belarusians to return home safely and help rebuild a democratic, independent country.

Maryna (Spain): *“Another important thing we did was this: the president of our association issued an instruction that we must file complaints in cases where a Cédula de Inscripción is not issued. Complaints should be filed through the ombudsperson and their office. And I know that people have filed many such complaints.”*

Katsiaryna (France): *“One example of such solidarity is the legal aid coalition in Strasbourg, which has already yielded its first result: a Belarusian obtained French citizenship with an already expired Belarusian passport and without having an issued residence permit at that moment. That is, for nearly two years, he had not had a permanent residence permit. After several attempts, he applied for a passport and, as a result, received his French passport, even without a valid Belarusian one.”*

Yuras: *“It's great that there are students here who are studying and gaining skills that I hope they'll one day bring back to Belarus. We can support our language in the countries where we live. And most importantly — we must change our tone. We are not “poor Belarusians”; we are part of the European system. And we are part of the security system. Without an independent, democratic Belarus, there will be no security in our region.”*

“What (Doesn’t) Work: How Can Diaspora Cooperate with Donors?”

Moderator: **Hanna Liubakova** / Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council



Donor Priorities and Funding Mechanisms

International support institutions have demonstrated a flexible approach to defining their program priorities. For example, the European Endowment for Democracy deliberately avoids publicly disclosing rigid eligibility criteria for applicants. This approach allows the organization to respond quickly to the evolving needs of Belarusian civil society. Experts identify support for independent media and civic initiatives inside Belarus as among the fund’s key priorities. A similar approach is pursued by the Netherlands through its dedicated democracy and transformation support programs. These initiatives focus on protecting freedom of expression, advancing human rights, and assisting former political prisoners. At the same time, German political foundations place greater emphasis on the long-term development of democratic institutions and political party structures. Policy analysis and regional security issues also feature prominently in their work. Another important area of support is the systematic assistance provided to Belarusian students and the academic community, helping preserve educational opportunities and strengthen intellectual capacity for the country’s future.

Professionalization and Sustainability of Organizations

The effectiveness of Belarusian NGOs directly depends on the depth and duration of their partnerships with donors. Experts note the need to shift from organizing one-off events to achieving meaningful social change. A high level of professionalism in preparing grant applications and a deep understanding of a specific donor’s requirements significantly increase the chances of success. There is a clear need within the sector to develop internal capacity and managerial competencies. Following a significant reduction in funding from the United States, this issue has become critical. Organizations are forced to seek new ways to survive amid severe resource constraints. Integrating the unique experiences of former political prisoners into the current activities opens up new opportunities for the movement’s development.

External Challenges and Political Agency

The current geopolitical situation is forcing the Belarusian community to shift toward a model of active agency. The diaspora must view itself as a full-fledged part of the society of its country of residence and engage directly with local politicians. Direct lobbying for national interests through the parliaments of European states is becoming an essential element of the survival strategy. The regime’s use of “extremism” labels does not deter international partners in the least. On the contrary, such persecution often serves as an additional incentive to increase support. Donors fully understand the political motivation behind such accusations and continue to cooperate with trusted organizations. A clear division of roles between political bodies and the civil sector helps strengthen the international legitimacy of the entire movement.

Prospects and Innovations in the Civil Sector

The future of Belarusian civil society is closely linked to the development of internal solidarity and a strong culture of philanthropy. The ability of Belarusians to mobilize substantial resources through crowdfunding has earned the respect and confidence of international partners and observers. In the long run, this capacity may help reduce dependence on foreign grants and external funding. Although overall levels of international assistance are declining, Belarus remains an important issue on the regional agenda. The resilience, adaptability, and creativity demonstrated by Belarusian communities have made them some of the most effective civic actors in the international arena. Maintaining a

long-term strategic vision and planning for the country's future decades ahead will remain essential. Ultimately, the goal of these efforts is to build a modern democratic system founded on open dialogue, civic participation, and mutual trust.

Wojciech (Netherlands): *"This means that not all is lost in Belarus and there is still hope. But it also means that you, as a diaspora that left Belarus and was forced to leave, have every right to demand your rights as citizens of new countries from the politicians in those countries."*

Tsimur: *"This is also important to us because over the past five or six years, we've seen how Belarusian society itself, through various crowdfunding campaigns or other tools, can raise and allocate resources much more effectively than donors ever could."*

Tsimur: *"I can say that Belarus and Belarusian society are currently among the most supported in this region, for example, by the European Union. And this is no coincidence: in recent years, it has become absolutely clear that your civil society is one of the most resilient, creative, and mobilized in the region."*

Debate Among Coordination Council Candidates

"Why Do Belarusians Abroad Need the Coordination Council?"

Moderator: Vitaly Tsyhankou / journalist and political analyst

Participants: representatives of electoral lists running in the Coordination Council (4th convocation)



Transition to a Parliamentary Model and Legal Recognition

The Coordination Council seeks to evolve into a fully-fledged proto-parliamentary body, capable of helping shape public policy and prepare for Belarus's democratic future. The body is intended to serve as a legitimate representative of the Belarusian nation on the international stage. Participants in the discussion emphasized the importance of legislative and policy-development work in laying the legal foundations for a future democratic Belarus. At the same time, obtaining formal legal status in European countries remains a challenge due to national legal frameworks and regulatory requirements. Despite these bureaucratic obstacles, the Council continues its efforts to strengthen its institutional standing and gain broader recognition from international partners and institutions.

Pragmatic Support and Social Challenges Facing the Community

The top priority of the democratic forces' work is addressing the everyday problems faced by Belarusian families in exile. This includes systematic assistance with legal procedures, opening bank accounts, and finding employment. The community pays special attention to protecting the rights of children who face discrimination in schools abroad. The Coordination Council must guarantee every Belarusian the right to preserve their national identity and dignity. The professional fulfillment of specialists in their new places of residence is seen as the key to preserving the nation's intellectual potential.

Political Pressure and Security Mechanisms

The strategy of the democratic forces is based on maintaining consistent international pressure on the

regime through sanctions and other accountability measures. Activists are also working to bring those responsible for repression to justice through international legal mechanisms. Alongside these political efforts, the discussion focused on the need to establish institutions capable of ensuring stability and security during a democratic transition. Such structures could help safeguard national archives, protect financial assets, and maintain public order. Another important area of work is the development of legal mechanisms for restoring property rights and returning assets confiscated from citizens who have been subjected to political repression.

Economic Sustainability and Internal Unity

Within the democratic community, discussions have been ongoing about the financial independence of representative bodies. Some leaders advocate for a gradual transition toward self-financing in order to ensure full autonomy from external donors. At the same time, many experts emphasize that large-scale cultural, educational, and civic initiatives cannot be implemented without grant funding. Coordination is further complicated by differing approaches to internal security protocols and participant vetting procedures. Nevertheless, all sides agree on the importance of active engagement in political life as a means of shaping the country's future. Despite these differences, solidarity and open dialogue remain the most important tools for overcoming the crisis of trust and strengthening unity within the Belarusian nation.

Sviatlana (Ukraine): *“As a person from Ukraine, I want to say that the phrase ‘I’m not interested in politics’ leads to politics coming to your home — with bombs, explosions, and tanks. That is why I urge everyone to come out and vote for peace in our home.”*

Panel Discussion

“Political Advocacy: Challenges and Opportunities”

Moderator:

Dzmitry Mitskevich / journalist at Belsat, military analyst

Speakers:

Franak Viacorka / Chief Advisor to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Pavel Latushka / Deputy Head of the United Transitional Cabinet, Head of the National Anti-Crisis Management

Alisa Ryzhychenka / Representative for Economy and Finance of the United Transitional Cabinet. Head of the “European Choice” campaign team for the Coordination Council

Iryna Khalopitsa / Deputy Chair of the International Commission of the Coordination Council. Head of the delegation of the Belarusian democratic forces to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Ryta Hatsikh / Member of the Coordination Council, “Latushka’s Team and Movement ‘For Freedom’” faction. Delegate of the Coordination Council to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dmitri Vasserman / Representative of the People’s Embassy of Belarus in Sweden

Kryscina Šyjanok / Office of Belarus Democratic Forces in the Czech Republic



Strengthening Political Institutions and Civic Engagement

Belarusian democratic bodies need constant and active support from compatriots abroad to affirm their legitimacy. Participation in elections and open voting creates a strong mandate for negotiations with leaders of Western countries. Mass attendance at rallies and cultural events significantly increases the political weight of the community in the eyes of foreign governments. Strong institutions allow the democratic forces to represent national interests much more effectively at the highest international levels. At the same time, maintaining activism is a crucial factor in preventing the dictatorship's attempts to establish a separate dialogue with the West.

Practical Advocacy and Exchange of Legal Expertise

Effective advocacy for Belarusians' rights requires moving beyond general complaints and presenting concrete legal cases. The experience of Belarusian communities in different countries helps identify and promote the most effective legalization and integration mechanisms. For example, France's practice of issuing temporary residence permits to certain categories of foreign nationals may provide a useful model for similar advocacy efforts on behalf of Belarusians. In the Czech Republic, Belarusians have already obtained official recognition as a national minority, giving them direct access to municipal and government-level institutions. In addition, systematically informing international organizations about the challenges faced by Belarusians abroad helps ensure that these issues are reflected in official resolutions, reports, and policy discussions. In this way, the collection of reliable information at the local level becomes the foundation for broader advocacy and international engagement.

Belarusian Expertise as a Contribution to European Security

The Belarusian community acts not only as a recipient of assistance but also as a valuable provider of unique knowledge. Belarusians possess deep expertise in countering the Kremlin's influence and understanding the threats posed by their eastern neighbor. This knowledge is in high demand by the governments of the European Union and NATO member states amid the current security crisis. Experts provide detailed reports on military cooperation between regimes and methods of spreading disinformation. In turn, the experience of fighting dictatorship proves useful even for democratic societies facing political challenges. Belarusian specialists in technology and media are already helping other countries monitor foreign interference in electoral processes.

The Struggle for National Image and Information Sovereignty

One of the key priorities for the Belarusian community remains overcoming the tendency of Western media to view Belarus through the prism of Russian interests. Belarusian activists and journalists in Germany and Austria have been consistently working to build an independent Belarusian presence in the information space. Publications in leading newspapers and participation in expert discussions help bring the authentic voice of the Belarusian nation to a broader audience. A coordinated response to mistakes in the use of national symbols or the transliteration of Belarusian names also helps reinforce the country's distinct identity and agency. At the same time, Belarusian representatives on the international stage clearly distinguish their goals from the agenda of the Russian opposition. Strengthening a European-oriented Belarusian identity contributes to deeper integration into the democratic community of nations. Ultimately, success in this long-term effort depends on individual initiative and the ability to scale successful advocacy and engagement practices across all countries where Belarusians reside.

Franak: *"We need to place greater emphasis on our successes. We are not very good at showcasing our achievements or telling our success stories. One of the conclusions from this conference is that we should take the successful examples we heard during yesterday's pitches, package them into clear case studies, amplify them, and share them with Belarusian communities in other countries where the diaspora is smaller, so they can see how these challenges were addressed."*

“Mapping the Problems of Belarusians Abroad”

Moderator: Alexandra Mamaeva / Head of the International Commission of the Coordination Council,
Representative of the People's Embassies in Slovenia



Systematic Monitoring and Advocacy Mechanisms

The initiative by the People's Embassies of Belarus is focused on conducting an in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by Belarusians across Council of Europe member states. This work responds to requests from European institutions for reliable information on the situation of Belarusians in exile. Experts are collecting successful case studies and conducting extensive interviews with human rights defenders, lawyers, and community representatives. The outcome will be a comprehensive mapping of key challenges and effective solutions that can be used in international advocacy efforts. Such evidence is essential for promoting changes in national legislation and administrative practices. This systematic approach enables the democratic forces to advocate with a unified and well-substantiated position.

Overcoming Administrative Barriers and the Passport Crisis

One of the most pressing issues remains the situation created by the Lukashenka regime's decision to restrict passport services abroad. Several approaches are being explored, including the acceptance of expired Belarusian passports for residence purposes and other legal procedures. At the same time, obtaining alien travel documents remains a complicated administrative process in many countries. Slovenia and Portugal are often cited as positive examples, where practical solutions have already been successfully implemented. In contrast, in a number of other states, Belarusians find themselves trapped in a bureaucratic deadlock due to the absence of valid residence permits or travel documents. High rejection rates for international protection (asylum) applications create additional challenges and vulnerabilities.

The New Belarusian Passport Project and Legal Assistance

The project for a new Belarusian passport requires consistent political recognition from Western partners. The document is intended to complement, rather than replace, existing Belarusian passports by helping confirm the holder's identity and legal status. An important objective is securing international recognition of the Belarus Passport Center as a legitimate institution. At the same time, Belarusian communities continue addressing practical issues such as apostilles, marriage registration, and driver's licenses. For example, Slovenia has introduced procedures allowing personal declarations to substitute for documents that can no longer be obtained from Belarus. In Lithuania, discussions are underway regarding the possibility of taking driver's license examinations in the person's native language. These measures help Belarusians preserve their identity while integrating into their host societies.

Security and Interagency Cooperation

Growing pressure through mechanisms such as Interpol notices and deportation risks has highlighted the need for stronger protection systems. Activists advocate for preventive safeguards against politically motivated persecution. Another important tool is the creation of interministerial working groups in host countries. Direct engagement with government officials makes it possible to explain the specific realities faced by Belarusians and address administrative misunderstandings more effectively. At the same time, better coordination between different government agencies remains a key challenge. Public attention and transparency around cases of transnational repression also play an important role in strengthening community security.

Toward Harmonization and Long-Term Solutions

The long-term objective is to develop a more coordinated European approach to Belarus-related issues. This includes proposals to establish a Belarus competence center within the European Commission to collect and analyze relevant information. Plans also include an online platform bringing together government practices, diaspora expertise, and policy recommendations. Harmonizing document-related procedures across Europe would significantly simplify life for Belarusians and reduce administrative burdens on national authorities. Recognition of emerging Belarusian democratic institutions would provide a stronger foundation for the country's future democratic development. Solidarity, professionalism, and sustained cooperation remain essential for success in this long-term effort.

Aliaksandra: *“The first initiative is an IT tool for implementing the Luxembourg Solutions. It has already been included in the Council of Europe’s Cooperation Plan with Belarus. The platform will bring together information from the diaspora on current challenges, best practices, and successful case studies, as well as information from governments about the measures they are taking and how these are being applied. Above all, it is intended to serve as a practical tool for governments working with Belarusians.”*

Group Work Results Presentation

“Joint Solutions to Support Belarusians Abroad”

Resolving Issues of Legal Stay and Documentation

Belarusian communities in exile face a serious challenge due to the mass expiration of national passports. Experts suggest focusing primary efforts on amending departmental regulations rather than full-fledged laws. This approach allows for significantly faster adaptation of migration policy to the emergency. An important step is the development of unified rules for working with Belarusians in all host countries. Migration authorities often encourage people to seek international protection status (asylum) instead of applying for residence permits due to a reluctance to undertake complex procedures. However, the diaspora should independently propose ready-made legal solutions to the authorities based on their practical experience. Interagency meetings involving the ministries of the interior and foreign affairs help overcome bureaucratic gridlock. The experience of Spain and France in recognizing expired documents serves as a positive example. As a temporary solution, the use of the New Belarusian Passport as a supplementary document for identity verification could be considered.

Countering Assimilation and Developing Identity

The assimilation of Belarusians abroad is often shaped by concerns about personal safety and pressures within host societies. Some individuals consciously distance themselves from their Belarusian identity due to feelings of stigma or fear of xenophobia. Addressing this challenge requires maintaining any possible connection to Belarusian culture, no matter how small. This approach involves supporting all levels of national self-awareness — from a basic sense of distinctiveness to a deeper understanding of Belarusian history, language, and culture. Belarusian schools, cultural projects, and creative initiatives help provide a strong foundation for community life. Proposals such as global membership programs and Belarusian community cards could further strengthen horizontal ties between Belarusians living in different countries. Belarusian-language popular culture also has an important role to play. Making it contemporary, appealing, and relevant to younger generations can help foster a stronger sense of identity. Shared cultural events, community activities, and exchanges between Belarusian groups across

countries help preserve a sense of national unity despite life in exile.

Building a Positive Image and Sense of Identity

The economic contribution of Belarusians often goes unnoticed by governments and local communities in their countries of residence. Despite the high qualifications of many professionals, the Belarusian community continues to face a lack of visibility in the public sphere. One proposed solution is to organize thematic exhibitions in national parliaments to showcase the professional achievements and contributions of Belarusians abroad. The formal registration of community organizations makes it possible to engage with governments as a recognized and organized constituency. A key communications objective is to fully dissociate the Belarusian nation from the regime currently in power in Belarus. A unified digital platform could help collect success stories and connect Belarusians across different parts of the world. Belarusians should present themselves as an educated, creative, and integral part of the European community. Active engagement with local residents through churches, community centers, and other public spaces can further strengthen trust and foster closer ties with host societies.

Ensuring Safety and Combating Repression

The regime continues to use mechanisms of transnational repression to put pressure on activists and their relatives. Systematically documenting every case of threats, harassment, or surveillance is essential for international advocacy efforts. Strict digital security practices include using only secure messaging platforms and avoiding opening suspicious files. Protecting devices and being cautious about sharing geolocation data on social media can significantly reduce risks. Promptly reporting incidents to local law enforcement helps build an evidentiary record for future international legal proceedings. Every Belarusian bears personal responsibility for following security protocols when communicating with relatives and friends inside the country. Solidarity, vigilance, and mutual support remain the most effective ways to protect the community in the face of ongoing threats.

Aliaksei: *"The image of the Belarusian diaspora begins with each of us. Someone in our group said today: 'If we treat our neighbors well, people will see what Belarusians are really like.' We came to the conclusion that we strengthen the countries where we live — as builders, doctors, athletes, and professionals in many other fields — but very few people know about it. One deputy minister told me: 'When you hear about ethnic communities, you think of Ukrainians, Vietnamese, and others. But where are you, Belarusians?' And it's a fair question. Where are we? We discussed the importance of doing things that enhance the reputation of Belarusians in the countries where we live. I understand that passports, residence permits, and legal status are all important. But it is equally important to take actions that build trust and respect, so that when a Belarusian walks into a post office, a clinic, or any public institution, the reaction is: 'Oh, a Belarusian — they deserve to be treated with respect, at the very least.'"*