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New Belarus Conference '26



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Creating a New Window of Opportunity Instead of Waiting

Challenges. Strategy. Priorities

The situation in Belarus and the wider region is changing. The United States has successfully secured the release of political prisoners, proceedings against Aliaksandr Lukashenka have been launched in The Hague, Russia is facing strikes on its own territory, and the regime has softened its pro-war rhetoric. At the same time, repression continues, although its forms are evolving. These developments create both new challenges and new opportunities for the democratic forces of Belarus. How can they seize the political initiative and change the status quo?

Moderator: Roza Turarbekava, *PhD, international relations expert*

Speakers:

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya,
*President-Elect of Belarus,
Head of the United
Transitional Cabinet*

Viktar Babaryka,
*Belarusian civic and political
leader*

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

Pavel Seviarynets,
*Co-Chair of the Belarusian
Christian Democracy party,
writer, former political
prisoner*

Artsiom Brukhan,
*Speaker of the Coordination
Council*

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya opened the panel by stressing that developments in Belarus depend not only on the democratic forces but also on external factors, the most important of which remains the war in Ukraine. According to her, the future window of opportunity will depend directly on Ukraine's strength, European unity, and US actions. Ms. Tsikhanouskaya stressed the importance of ensuring that the release of political prisoners does not lead to the lifting of sanctions and the legitimization of the Lukashenka regime without real political change. A return to "business as usual" may partially reduce hybrid threats but will not lead to long-term change. The speaker noted that the democratic forces would work with any new governments and explain to them that a democratic Belarus is also a matter of their own security. The strategy towards Belarus must be broader and more long-term than securing the release of political prisoners and supporting Belarusian volunteers defending Ukraine. Ms. Tsikhanouskaya called for holding the regime accountable and maintaining sanctions pressure.

Pavel Latushka stressed the importance of three elements of the democratic forces' strategy: putting pressure on the regime through sanctions, holding those responsible accountable, and preparing for a transition of power. He recalled the mistakes of 2013–2016, when the West believed Lukashenka and moved towards rapprochement with the regime without involving the opposition, against the backdrop of negotiations on Ukraine. Mr. Latushka proposed preparing for a scenario involving new major peace negotiations. In such a case, negotiations on resolving the Belarusian crisis, with the participation of the US and EU, should take place alongside the international negotiations. The democratic forces must also be recognized as an actor in such processes. The speaker identified four

factors that could create a “window of opportunity”: the existing systemic crisis; broad support for Belarusian independence, which provides a foundation for overcoming the crisis; growing recognition among pragmatic figures within the regime that change is necessary; and a weakening of Russia, the regime’s main source of support.

Viktar Babaryka shifted the focus of the discussion from external factors to the internal problems of the democratic forces. He raised the question of what real value the democratic forces currently offer to Belarusian society. According to Mr. Babaryka, people inside Belarus are now largely uninterested in what is happening within the democratic community. Therefore, it is necessary to answer the question of why millions of citizens should vote for the democratic forces in the future — and address the lack of interest in the democratic forces’ current activities.

Pavel Seviarynets warned that a window of opportunity could open suddenly and rapidly — for example, in the event of the collapse of the system in Russia, which could be triggered by a new mobilization. According to Mr. Seviarynets, the democratic forces are prepared for such a development in the areas of diplomacy and media but are much less prepared when it comes to military security. Mr. Seviarynets called for cooperation with Belarusian volunteer fighters in Ukraine and for building a pool of qualified personnel now — people who could return to Belarus in the event of change and take part in implementing reforms.

Moderator Rozā Turarbekava also raised the issue of Russification, asking **Pavel Seviarynets** whether it was possible to resist it or whether the issue of Belarusianization should be postponed until better times. Mr. Seviarynets categorically rejected the idea of postponing the issue. He said that without the Belarusian language, there would be no Belarus itself, and called on the Belarusian elite and diaspora to use their native language more actively. Among possible steps, he proposed establishing a genuine Belarusian national university abroad, for example, in Białystok.

Artsiom Brukhan cited Venezuela and the country’s experience as an example, showing how institutions created by the democratic forces can become full-fledged participants in negotiations when a window of opportunity opens. He supported the idea of a national dialogue and noted that its foundation should be Belarusian independence, which, according to him, is supported by 95–97% of citizens.



Through Peace in Ukraine to Freedom in Belarus

Challenges. Scenarios. Cooperation

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's visit to Kyiv in May has opened new opportunities for Belarusian-Ukrainian cooperation. How can Belarusians and Ukrainians support one another? What joint steps can be taken in the near future, and what cooperation is already underway? What should be the priorities for strategic cooperation?

Moderator: Yevhen Mahda, *Ukrainian political scientist, Executive Director of the Institute of World Policy*

Speakers:

Franak Viacorka,
Chief Advisor to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Iaroslav Chornogor,
*Ambassador-at-Large,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of
Ukraine*

Anatol Mikhnnavets,
*Vice Speaker of the
Coordination Council*

Vadym Halaichuk,
*Co-Chair of the Inter-Factional
Parliamentary Group "For a
Democratic Belarus" in the
Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine*

Sviatlana Shatsilina,
*Head of the Mission of
Democratic Belarus in Kyiv*

Vadzim Kabanchuk,
*Representative for National
Security and Defense of the
United Transitional Cabinet*

At the beginning of the discussion, moderator **Yevhen Mahda** asked the participants to outline the current state and prospects of Belarus-Ukraine relations.

Franak Viacorka noted that Ukraine is an unequivocal priority for the democratic forces of Belarus, as the opening of a "window of opportunity" for Belarus depends on Ukraine's success. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's visit to Kyiv in May opened new doors and demonstrated the Ukrainian leadership's readiness to cooperate. Among the results already achieved, he highlighted President Zelenskyy's ultimatum, which prompted Lukashenko to change his rhetoric; the establishment of sanctions-related information sharing through BLPOL; and joint efforts to hold Lukashenko accountable before the International Criminal Court, where Ukraine could join Lithuania's referral of the regime's crimes. He also mentioned the possibility of expanding work through the Council of National Minorities to strengthen the voice of the Belarusian community, proposed turning the Lublin Triangle into a "quadrilateral," and called for developing ties at the civil society level. At the same time, he identified expired passports as the main practical problem facing Belarusians in Ukraine. This affects between 100 and 3,000 people and creates a constant fear of deportation.

Iaroslav Chornogor confirmed that his appointment as Ambassador-at-Large was initiated by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and approved by President Zelenskyy specifically to establish official channels of communication with Belarus's democratic forces. One of the first significant results of this work was Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's visit. According to Ambassador Chornogor, there is now full mutual understanding and support on the foreign policy track between the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry and Belarusian democratic structures.

Anatol Mikhnavecs stated that peace will come only after Ukraine's victory and that this is the only real "window of opportunity" for Belarusians. He called for the creation of a powerful, independent Belarusian military unit in Ukraine and for strengthening the security sector.

Vadym Halaichuk noted that Ukrainian society is divided: one half considers Belarusians enemy co-aggressors, while the other sees them as residents of an occupied territory. This is also reflected in the Verkhovna Rada, where two opposing draft resolutions on the status of Belarus have been registered. The task of the democratic forces and Ukraine is to translate cooperation into concrete initiatives to shift Ukrainian public opinion in a positive direction. Mr. Halaichuk stressed that the Inter-Factional Association "For a Democratic Belarus" in the Verkhovna Rada includes the heads of all Rada delegations to international organizations such as the OSCE, PACE, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. To make their advocacy efforts effective, Belarus's democratic forces need to formulate clear requests.

Sviatlana Shatsilina noted that the democratic forces still do not speak to the Ukrainian authorities with one voice and remain fragmented. She stressed that Belarusians are not doing enough to communicate their potential value to Ukraine. At the same time, she pointed out that the conditions for Belarusian volunteers are the same as for other foreigners, even though their motivation is fundamentally different, which limits their numbers.

Vadzim Kabanchuk noted positive trends in bilateral relations but pointed to a worrying development: while the Kastus Kalinouski Regiment is fighting on Ukraine's side, several thousand Belarusians are fighting on Russia's side, mostly mercenaries from the eastern regions of Belarus attracted by large financial payments. More than 500 of them have already been killed, while several dozen are in captivity. Mr. Kabanchuk called for information about the enormous death toll in Russian assault units to be communicated to Belarusian citizens.

Yevhen Mahda noted that more than 25,000 Ukrainian citizens have signed a petition calling for changes to legislation so that foreigners can receive the title of Hero of Ukraine. Belarusian activists played an active role in the campaign, seeking to honor the memory of Belarusian volunteers who gave their lives for the freedom of Ukraine and Belarus.

Kryścina Šyjanok (Office of Belarus Democratic Forces in the Czech Republic) asked the Ukrainian guests about the possibility of creating a memorial or an avenue for fallen Belarusian soldiers at Lukianivske Cemetery, where Maria Zaitseva is buried. **Iaroslav Chornogor** replied that honoring the memory of heroes is an important issue for Ukrainian society as a whole and that the National Military Memorial Cemetery is currently being developed. Creating separate avenues or arranging individual graves requires joint efforts, and the Ukrainian side does not oppose such initiatives.

Former volunteer fighter **Aliaksandr Klachko** and activist **Ihar Tsikhaniuk** raised the issues of unblocking bank accounts, providing payments to the families of fallen Belarusian soldiers, and determining the status of Belarus. **Iaroslav Chornogor** urged participants to take the realities of wartime into account, noting that Ukraine's entire state apparatus is operating in survival mode and responding to daily Russian air strikes, meaning that many civil and legal issues have had to be postponed. **Sviatlana Shatsilina** explained that banks are required to operate within existing restrictions, and resolving the issue requires either the political will to change the law or targeted legal measures. **Vadym Halaichuk** outlined the main difficulty with payments to the families of fallen soldiers: Ukraine cannot transfer significant amounts of foreign currency to relatives living in Belarus or Russia, as the money could enter the enemy's economy or be confiscated by the regime. As for the status of Belarus, recognizing it as "occupied" could provide Lukashenka with an alibi, so Ukraine is awaiting decisions from an international tribunal.

Dzianis Herasimchyk of the Kalinouski Movement (Kalinoucy) and the Volia faction in the Coordination Council criticized the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, arguing that support for volunteers and Belarusians in Ukraine is a low priority and that there are therefore no practical results in this area. **Franak Viacorka** disagreed with this assessment, stating that volunteers have always been a priority and that they were precisely the people who changed Ukrainians' attitudes

towards Belarusians. He recalled joint work with Mr. Halaichuk on adopting legislation on volunteer fighters, launching the petition for the title of Hero of Ukraine, and successfully unblocking accounts for Belarusians with legal status in Ukraine. He noted that bank account-related problems now mainly affect those who moved to the EU and did not complete internal verification.



Topic I. Punish Not Forgive?

Where Should We Draw the Line?

A: Without lustration, vetting, and professional bans for everyone involved in repression, we will simply pave the way for the return of authoritarianism. The system of violence will be restored, and its victims will be betrayed. Justice and accountability for perpetrators are the only foundation on which trust in new democratic institutions can be built.

B: If we dismiss or imprison civil servants, security officers, and teachers, the country will simply stop functioning: there will be no one to run cities, educate children, or maintain critical infrastructure. We need our own “pact of forgetting” and national reconciliation to avoid a new division and ensure a peaceful democratic transition.

Moderator: Kseniya Lutskina, *Moderator: Kseniya Lutskina, journalist, member of the first Coordination Council, former political prisoner*

Debaters:

Mikalai Dziadok,
*civic and political activist,
blogger, writer, former
political prisoner (twice)*

Roza Turarbekava,
*PhD, international relations
expert*

Mikalai Dziadok argued in favor of lustration, vetting, and restricting access to public service for people who participated in repression. In his view, without such measures, there is a risk of the authoritarian system being restored. At the same time, he acknowledged that given the scale of repression, it is impossible to apply the same approach to everyone. Lustration should therefore be differentiated and carried out in stages. As a negative example, he cited Nicaragua, where the authorities abandoned lustration after the change of power in the 1990s. According to Mr. Dziadok, this eventually allowed Daniel Ortega to return to power in 2006 and led to a new wave of violence in 2018.

Roza Turarbekava argued that strict lustration laws could lead to sabotage by the state apparatus, increased social tensions, and further division in society. She suggested considering a model of national reconciliation or temporary “forgetting,” citing Spain’s Pact of Forgetting as an example. According to Ms. Turarbekava, during a transition of power, Belarus could face an acute shortage of personnel in the army, police, education, and healthcare systems. It is therefore necessary to assess each person’s degree of involvement in repression and individual responsibility rather than apply the same measures to everyone. Ms. Turarbekava noted that sweeping purges of the state apparatus could have unpredictable consequences. She cited Iraq as an example, where comprehensive de-Baathification left former military personnel and civil servants without jobs, some of whom later joined the Islamic State. In her view, in the face of an external threat, it is particularly important to preserve social unity and find a way to integrate part of the existing state apparatus into the new system.

Mr. Dziadok argued that a successful democratic transition is impossible without justice. He pointed to how a policy of “forgetting” would be perceived by people who had been tortured or lost relatives, jobs, or businesses if, after a change of power, they saw their persecutors free and still holding their

former positions. **Ms. Turarbekava** acknowledged that this is a difficult moral choice but noted that society could temporarily accept such a compromise to preserve the country if respected people who had themselves experienced repression could explain the need for such a decision.

Mr. Dziadok disagreed with this argument. According to him, there is a strong demand for justice in Belarusian society. If it is ignored, people could become disillusioned with democracy and the rule of law, creating fertile ground for a new populist to come to power. He cited Belarus in 1994 as an example. **Ms. Turarbekava** disagreed with this interpretation of the events of 1994. She noted that the reasons for Aliaksandr Lukashenka's victory were more complex and that the concept of the rule of law in post-socialist society at the time remained insufficiently developed.

Against the backdrop of the Russian threat, **Ms. Turarbekava** raised the question of what should take priority: de-Sovietization or preserving national unity. **Mr. Dziadok** replied that genuine unity is impossible without de-Sovietization, as a significant proportion of security officials still adhere to the ideology of the "Russian world." **Ms. Turarbekava** disagreed with this assessment, calling the generalization about all security officials an excessive simplification that does not reflect the actual situation.

A question from the audience asked which country had carried out lustration most successfully. **Roza Turarbekava** named the Czech Republic. **Mikalai Dziadok** cited Peru, partly South Africa, as well as Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia as examples.

The vote was won by Mikalai Dziadok and the idea of broad lustration.

Debates

Topic II. Escaping the "Belarusian Enclosure" vs. Belarus First

A: Forcing — or even gently promoting — the Belarusian language across all spheres of life is an attempt to move forward while looking backwards. In the twenty-first century, success belongs to those who create globally competitive products and compete on the international market. It makes little difference whether the code of a Belarusian start-up, a scientific breakthrough, or a business is developed in English, Russian, or Belarusian. What matters is efficiency and results. An excessive focus on language confines us to a local space when we should be integrating into the global economy.

B: Globalism without a national foundation leads to complete assimilation and absorption into the "Russian World." If language and culture do not matter, why do we call ourselves Belarusians at all, rather than simply the inhabitants of a certain territory? Without our own identity, we will continue to lose the information and cultural war against Russia. A state that does not protect and develop its language has no future. A Belarusian can create a global product, but if it is disconnected from their culture, its value benefits other countries rather than a New Belarus.

Moderator: Kseniya Lutskina, Moderator: Kseniya Lutskina, journalist, member of the first Coordination Council, former political prisoner

Debaters:

Aliaksandr Fiaduta,
*public figure, literary scholar,
Doctor of Humanities, former
political prisoner*

**Kaciaryna
Vadanosava,**
*popularizer of Belarusian
history, musician, television
presenter*

Kaciaryna Vadanosava defended the importance of the Belarusian language, culture, and history as the foundation of national identity. She stressed that Belarusians are not a “herd” but a people with a unique cultural heritage. In her view, preserving national identity is not incompatible with openness to the world: Belarus can be part of the international community while maintaining its distinct identity. **Ms. Vadanosava** also highlighted the danger of cultural assimilation given Belarus’s proximity to Russia, which operates according to the imperial logic of “one language, one people.” In her view, the continued decline of the Belarusian language could also become a threat to the country’s independence.

Aliaksandr Fiaduta noted that Belarusian culture is not confined to some “enclosure.” He added that Belarusians in exile naturally use the languages of their countries of residence, such as Polish in Warsaw. In his view, it is important for Belarusians not to isolate themselves within their own culture but to be able to present it to the world while remaining open to other cultures. **Mr. Fiaduta** cited people who promote Belarusian culture abroad, including Andrei Khadanovich, as an example. In his view, this kind of work allows Belarusian culture to remain visible in the international context.

Ms. Vadanosava agreed that Belarusians in exile have to adapt to the rules of their countries of residence. However, she stressed that the Belarusian language remains the foundation of her personal identity: she had completely switched to Belarusian in her family life and thinking after 2006. She also raised the question of how Belarus can be protected from Russian cultural influence if the Belarusian language continues to lose ground inside the country.

Mr. Fiaduta acknowledged that the problem exists but proposed starting with practical steps. According to him, after the transfer of power to a democratic government, the first priority should be to ensure compliance with the existing law on the two official languages. If this can be achieved, the issue of language policy and relevant referendums could be revisited in five years.

In response to a question from journalist **Taras Tarnalitski** about support for Russian-language Belarusian culture in exile, **Ms. Vadanosava** said that this is a personal choice, although she herself had not bought a single Russian-language book while in exile. **Mr. Fiaduta** disagreed with this approach, arguing that a work should primarily be assessed based on its social significance. He cited Svetlana Alexievich as an example. **Mr. Fiaduta** also plans to write a book about his prison experience in Russian, as he believes this will allow a wider audience to read it.

Aliaksandr Fiaduta won the vote by a narrow margin.

Topic III. Does Neutrality Guarantee Belarus's Security?

A: For many years, opinion polls showed that many Belarusians viewed neutrality or non-alignment as the best guarantee against being drawn into regional or global military conflicts and geopolitical confrontation. The Swiss model — or a form of “Finlandization”, involving limited geopolitical maneuverability while preserving economic independence and sovereignty — is often presented as a viable option for living alongside an aggressive and ambitious neighbor.

B: Traditional models of neutrality no longer work in today's world. Even countries that once maintained a non-aligned status are rapidly abandoning it. We have entered an era of new global confrontation, and Belarus can only secure its future as part of a military-political alliance. Whether this means NATO or another regional security arrangement should be determined solely by strategic necessity and the terms of membership.

Moderator: Kseniya Lutskina, *Moderator: Kseniya Lutskina, journalist, member of the first Coordination Council, former political prisoner*

Debaters:

Andrei Kazakevich,
*PhD in Political Science,
Director of the Political
Sphere Institute of Political
Studies*

Dzmitry Mitskevich,
*journalist at Belsat, national
security and defense analyst*

Andrei Kazakevich argued in favor of neutrality. In his view, this idea could serve as the basis for a national consensus, as it has traditionally enjoyed support among Belarusian society. Belarus needs to break free from Russia's influence, but negotiating a neutral status with its neighbors would, in his view, be easier than joining a military alliance. Neutrality would also allow a small country to retain greater strategic autonomy.

Dzmitry Mitskevich described neutrality as a historically unsuccessful strategy. In his view, Belarus's formal neutrality in the 1990s did not provide security: Russia strengthened the Lukashenka regime, and Belarus ultimately became a participant in the war against Ukraine. Given its geography, Russia could view Belarusian neutrality as an opportunity to control the country, making a “Finlandization” scenario unrealistic. Moreover, he argued that armed neutrality in confrontation with Russia would be economically unsustainable.

In response, **Mr. Kazakevich** noted that Belarus was not genuinely neutral in the 1990s: the country quickly joined the CSTO and the Union State. He raised the question of how much defense and security guarantees would cost under a neutral status. **Mr. Mitskevich** agreed that neutral countries bear significant defense costs but stressed that Belarus currently spends little on defense, partly thanks to subsidized supplies from Russia.

Mr. Kazakevich also noted that neutrality does not mean rejecting defense partnerships and allows a country to build flexible relations with different sides. In his view, joining NATO would also require

significant spending on rearmament at Belarus's own expense. **Mr. Mitskevich** disagreed, arguing that integration into NATO and the European defense system could not only strengthen security but also give Belarusian companies access to the European arms market, as well as new investment and contracts. **Mr. Kazakevich** responded that neutral status in itself does not prevent arms exports, citing Switzerland as an example.

Asked whether neutrality could be a temporary solution before joining a military alliance, **Mr. Mitskevich** said that Belarus should already be declaring its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. **Mr. Kazakevich** noted that Belarusian society is not yet ready to join military alliances and is more inclined to avoid such a choice.

Asked what should come first — restoring sovereignty or determining a neutral status — **Mr. Kazakevich** replied that the two issues are interconnected: neutrality could become one way of consolidating state autonomy. **Mr. Mitskevich** agreed that sovereignty is the key priority but added that the democratic forces should already be demonstrating their readiness to contribute to European security.

Aliaksandra Mamayeva (Coordination Council) asked which alliances could realistically protect Belarus while the Russian threat persists and the country chooses neutrality. **Mr. Kazakevich** cited Switzerland and Finland as examples and said that Belarus should integrate into a common European security system while retaining the ability to receive guarantees from different sides. **Mr. Mitskevich** stressed that the main threat comes from Russia, so genuine security could only be ensured through a full-fledged alliance with neighboring countries — Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic states.

The vote ultimately favored the bloc-based position of integrating Belarus into a system of military and political alliances, defended by Dzmitry Mitskevich.



Post-Lukashenka Belarus

Reforms. Prospects. Visions

Change in Belarus is only a matter of time. Every dictatorship eventually falls. The question is what comes next? What could a democratic transition look like? Which reforms should be prepared, and is it worth preparing them already today? Can Belarus overcome its total dependence on Russia? What can the European Union offer Belarus, and what can Belarus offer the European Union? We must think not only about what we want to leave behind but also about the future we want to build.

Moderator: Aliaksandr Knyrovich, *entrepreneur, blogger, TV presenter* *Policy*

Speakers:

Dzmitry Kruk,
researcher at BERO

Lev Lvovsky,
Academic Director at BERO

Alisa Ryzhychenka,
*Representative for Economy
and Finance of the United
Transitional Cabinet*

Anatoli Liabedzka,
*Director of the European
Dialogue Center, Advisor to
Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya on
Constitutional Reform and
Parliamentary Cooperation*

Yuliya Mitskevich,
*gender expert, Office for
Social Policy of the United
Transitional Cabinet*

Yury Hubarevich,
*Chair of the For Freedom
Movement, Coordinator of the
Personnel Reserve initiative*

Moderator of the discussion, **Aliaksandr Knyrovich**, opened the panel by noting the long-term stagnation of the Belarusian economy: over the past 13 years, its overall growth has amounted to only around 12% (less than 1% per year on average). Mr. Knyrovich said that the current state system has no demand for reforms, so the democratic community must start planning the transition and future changes now.

Alisa Ryzhychenka noted that Belarus has fallen from 62nd to 85th place in the Global Innovation Index and explained that the problem lies not in human potential but in the system: Belarus ranks 133rd in the rule of law and 137th in the institutional environment for innovation. She added that only around 0.5% of GDP is spent on science, teachers earn three to four times less than in Poland, and high-tech exports account for just 4% of GDP. The expert noted that simply injecting money into science would not work; what is needed are market mechanisms, protection of private property, and tax incentives.

Dzmitry Kruk agreed on the need for reforms and added that the only path to the survival of an independent Belarus is European integration. He cited a BERO study according to which reorienting from Russia to the EU would result in a 6.5% decline in GDP over 2.5 years and require a stabilization fund of \$10–16 billion. Nevertheless, reforms are an investment in the future, and society must be prepared to bear their costs even while relying on external support. He also proposed a “Belarus Democratic Transition Facility” within the EU’s official mechanisms, modeled on the 2000 regulation for the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

Lev Lvovsky added to the economic analysis by estimating that pension reform could cost the

country \$40 billion or more. He cited the following figures: pensioners currently make up 26% of the population, while the birth rate has fallen from 1.7 children per woman in 2016 to 1.03 in 2025. The expert warned that by the end of the century, Belarus's population could decline to 3 million people, while pension spending could absorb a quarter of GDP. He also mentioned the gender gap in life expectancy, with men living on average 10 years less than women. **Mr. Lvovsky** added that Belarus would need to raise the retirement age, introduce funded pension accounts, attract migrants, and secure long-term loans at interest rates comparable to GDP growth.

Anatoli Liabedzka disagreed with the claim that the authors of the Constitution of New Belarus had worked without taking public opinion into account. He recalled that they had received 3,000 proposals from citizens over the course of a year, while almost 500,000 people took part in the vote on the Golas platform. He added that the €3 billion aid package promised by the EU is an underestimate and that having clearly defined projects could help persuade the European Commission to increase financial assistance to \$10 billion.

Yuliya Mitskevich disagreed with the claim that society is not interested in gender issues. She explained that studies show that domestic violence and wage inequality are considered highly important issues by the public. She added that the consequences of domestic violence cause economic harm to the country and stressed the need for comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, backed by actual budget funding.

Yury Hubarevich responded to proposals to completely replace the entire state apparatus, from 37,000 people in key positions to 180,000 employees overall. He said that around 700 trained participants in the "Personnel Reserve" are motivated leaders capable of driving reforms at the local level and changing the principles of public service without mass dismissals.

The discussion then turned to the participants' vision of the first steps politicians should take after the transition of power.

- **Anatoli Liabedzka** proposed launching an information campaign in support of reforms during the first three to four months, followed by a referendum and presidential elections simultaneously, so that the new president could immediately begin working with reduced constitutional powers. This would be followed by parliamentary elections under a new electoral code. According to Mr. Liabedzka, a parliamentary system of government and separation of powers would guarantee that dictatorship does not return.
- **Lev Lvovsky** outlined the following measures after the transition of power: launching a pro-natal policy, transferring migration policy to the Ministry of Labour, working with the diaspora, and reducing the 10-year gap in life expectancy between men and women.
- **Yury Hubarevich** stressed the importance of maintaining the governability of the state, launching local self-government, conducting an audit, and introducing a retraining program for current officials.
- **Yuliya Mitskevich** added the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, ILO Convention No. 190 and UN Security Council Resolution 1325, implementation of CEDAW recommendations, and adoption of a national gender equality plan. According to Ms. Mitskevich, actively involving women in decision-making and combating violence should help prevent a return to dictatorship.
- **Dzmitry Kruk** proposed officially notifying Russia of Belarus's withdrawal from the Union State and the Eurasian Economic Union and beginning work on an Association Agreement with the EU. He added that, ideally, the "Belarus Democratic Transition Facility" should already be in force by the time these steps are taken.
- **Alisa Ryzhychenka** called for the adoption of laws protecting private property and for

the full digitalization of the public sector and public procurement. She said this could save the state budget \$700–800 million a year, which could then be directed towards science and education.

In conclusion, **Aliaksandr Knyrovich** stressed that the discussion had not covered some of the most important reforms, including those of education, healthcare, the armed forces, the police and land relations. He called on the democratic forces to bring their existing proposals together into a single comprehensive vision for a new Belarus that could be openly presented and discussed with society.



Moderator: Maria Lando, *expert in civil society organization development*

Analytical Report: Comparative Analysis of National Dialogues in Germany, Poland, and Spain as Possible Models for Overcoming the Political Crisis in Belarus

Presenter: Artsiom Brukhan, *Deputy Head of the People's Anti-Crisis Management*

Presentation 

This document, developed by experts from the People's Anti-Crisis Management, emerged in a highly complex political context. Six years after the events of 2020, Belarus remains in a state of deep systemic political crisis, including a high degree of dependence on Russia.

The study proposes a model of managed political transition in Belarus aimed at ending repression, preserving independence, and ensuring continuity of state governance. National dialogue is defined as a negotiation process between representatives of the state system, democratic forces, and society to agree on a legal pathway towards free elections. Its prerequisites include the democratic forces' political agency, external conditions unfavorable to the regime, the presence of a pragmatic faction within the regime, and a legal framework ensuring continuity of state governance.

The proposed model consists of three stages: humanitarian de-escalation and the release of political prisoners, technical preparations for dialogue, and the conclusion of a political agreement. The intended outcome is a successful political transition.

Positive Alternative — A Vision of a New Belarus

Presenter: Anatoli Liabedzka, *Director of the European Dialogue Center, Advisor to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya on Constitutional Reform and Parliamentary Cooperation*

The European Dialogue Center project aims to develop a concrete model for Belarus after a change of power. Experts are drafting a Constitution and 13 key laws covering the judicial and electoral systems, the economy, education, healthcare, and other areas. These proposals are intended to give ordinary Belarusians and civil servants a clear understanding of how a new system could work. A positive alternative is also an important part of the path towards European integration.

Hundreds of Belarusian and international experts have already taken part in the project. The proposals are also being used in work with international partners and could serve as a foundation for future reforms. The materials are open for anonymous comments and discussion on the Prastora platform and are also available on Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's website and the Try Slany platform.

Raionka

Presenter: Stanislau Salavei, *Deputy Representative for Social Policy of the United Transitional Cabinet*

Presentation 

Raionka is an online platform that helps residents of Belarusian regions receive medical consultations from Belarusian doctors living abroad. The project addresses the shortage of sufficiently qualified doctors outside major cities. It is primarily aimed at people in the regions and vulnerable groups, including large families, former political prisoners, people with disabilities, and people who have experienced violence.

Consultations will be conducted securely, without the need to show one's face, using anonymous verification and allowing medical documents to be shared online. They will be free of charge for people in Belarus, with the costs covered by the diaspora. Each consultation costs the platform approximately €30 to provide. The platform is scheduled to launch in September 2026.

Try Slany Platform

Presenter: Daniel Harkavy, *Try Slany Platform / New Belarus*

Presentation 

Try Slany is a coordination platform and digital democracy tool for Belarusian organizations. It has already been used for elections to the Coordination Council. The new version will automate the collection and distribution of organizations' content, so they will not need to maintain an additional platform separately.

The updated platform will also offer tools for organizing events, voting, petitions, and participatory budgeting, as well as the ability to automatically import content from social media. Particular attention is paid to the security of users in Belarus: one-time codes and anonymous usernames are used. The new version is expected to launch in September 2026.

Digital Tools of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office

Presenter: Marharyta Vorykhava, *Advisor to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya on Youth Policy and Students*

Presentation 

The initiative brings together five digital projects designed to support Belarusians, strengthen civil society, and build infrastructure for the future Belarus. They include This is Youth, which provides information on education and support for students and young people; Padarozhzhza, which helps assess the opportunities and risks associated with travel; the Krynitsa resource portal for sharing

resources among NGOs; Mapa Padzei, an event map for Belarusian events around the world; and Prastora for participating in the development of laws and reforms.

Together, these tools address a range of needs, from education and security to mutual support, community activities, and participation in building future state institutions. Some projects are already operating and have an established audience, while others provide opportunities for Belarusians abroad and inside the country to engage more actively with one another.

Equality, Inclusion, Responsibility: Gender Policy Project for the Democratic Forces of Belarus

Presenter: Dr. Graziella Piga, *Consultant at the Council of Europe*

Presentation 

The project offers practical recommendations for improving gender-responsive governance within Belarusian democratic structures in line with European standards. The recommendations are based on an analysis of internal documents and interviews with stakeholders.

The main measures focus on four areas: improving internal policies and protections against discrimination; balanced representation of women and men; developing an inclusive organizational culture; and strengthening accountability through data collection, monitoring, and reporting.

Our Grunwald-2027: Ideas, Goals, Objectives

Presenter: Yury Meliashkevich, *Acting Chair of the Belarusian Popular Front Party*

Presentation 

The campaign aims to strengthen Belarusian representation at the annual Battle of Grunwald celebrations in Poland. Its goal is to restore Belarusian historical symbols in the public space, highlight the role of Belarusian lands, and involve Belarusians in the festival and historical reenactments. A petition supporting the initiative has collected more than 1,000 verified signatures.

After the campaign failed to secure official permission to display the white-red-white flag in 2026, the team proposed a longer-term solution: installing an artistic memorial at the Grunwald battlefield honoring Belarusian warriors. The project is seen as a tool for engaging with Polish society and preserving the Belarusian tradition of historical reenactment.

Belarus Democracy Tokens: Concept for a Self-Financing System for the Democratic Movement

Presenter: Alisa Ryzhychenka, *Representative for Economy and Finance of the United Transitional Cabinet*

Presentation 

The project proposes creating a long-term self-financing system for Belarusian democratic initiatives to reduce their dependence on short-term international grants. Donations could be made through various payment systems, while the BDT mechanism would record each donor's contribution on a blockchain.

Following democratic change, donors would be able to receive compensation for their contributions in one of several forms, such as tax benefits, recognition towards their employment record, or pension contributions. The funds raised would be distributed among democratic governance institutions, the social sector and education, independent media, and culture and national identity. Each sector would have its own council responsible for allocating funds within that sector. The system is planned to launch by the end of 2026.



Belarus as a Laboratory of Authoritarian Regimes

Accountability. Human Rights. Security

Belarus has become a testing ground for modern authoritarianism, where mechanisms of repression and persecution are refined — from “extremist” lists and the passport decree to the case against the European Humanities University and the misuse of INTERPOL. How can we ensure the safety of activists inside Belarus and abroad? How can legal assistance be strengthened? How can cooperation with governments and international organizations be strengthened to counter transnational repression?

Moderator: Fiodar Pauliuchenka, *Editor-in-Chief at Reform.news*

Speakers:

Leanid Marozau,
Advisor to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya on Legal Affairs

Aleh Aheyau,
Deputy Chair of the Belarusian Association of Journalists

Matsvei Kupreichyk,
public representative of BELPOL

Uladzimir Labkovich,
representative of the Viasna Human Rights Center, former political prisoner

Monika Stanisława Płatek,
member of the UN Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus

Ales Mikhalevich,
PhD in Political Science, civic and political figure

Joanna Szymańska,
Head of Programs and Strategy for Europe at ARTICLE 19

Uladzimir Labkovich opened the discussion by sharing his own experience as a political prisoner. According to him, unlike previous waves of repression, torture after 2020 became not isolated abuses at the local level but a systemic practice. Security officials who committed crimes on behalf of the state have effectively remained unpunished.

Aleh Aheyau highlighted the scale of repression against independent media. He pointed to the designation of media outlets as “extremist,” criminal cases against journalists, and the effective criminalization of reading independent media. **Mr. Aheyau** also highlighted a new widespread practice: attempts by the security forces to recruit citizens to infiltrate civic and political groups and inform on their members, using threats and coercion.

Matsvei Kupreichyk called on people targeted for recruitment by the security services not to remain silent about such attempts. He recommended either publicly exposing recruitment attempts or completely ignoring KGB officers. According to him, it is important not to allow the regime to impose distrust between people and turn society into an environment of general suspicion. **Ales Mikhalevich** stressed that attempts at recruitment should be immediately reported to human rights defenders.

Mr. Kupreichyk added that Belarus’s repressive system is supported by Russia, which uses the country as a kind of “laboratory.” At the same time, he noted the regime’s vulnerability: amid the possibility of an escalation of Russia’s war against Ukraine, security officials and military personnel may not necessarily be willing to fight and die for Lukashenka. In his view, the democratic forces

should offer them an alternative that would allow them and their families to preserve their lives and security in exchange for changing their political course.

Turning to transnational repression, **Leanid Marozau** noted that the Lukashenka regime has become more sophisticated at disguising political persecution in its requests for international searches through Interpol. While openly political charges were used in 2020, in 2023–2024, requests increasingly began to be framed as cases involving economic or drug-related crimes. According to Mr. Marozau, 17 extradition cases based on such requests have already been prevented. He also reported that a report was being prepared on 11 employees of Belarus's National Central Bureau of Interpol suspected of fabricating cases and called on international partners to restrict Minsk's ability to use the system.

Ales Mikhalevich noted that Interpol has already strengthened its scrutiny of requests from Belarus, but the use of non-political charges makes this work significantly more difficult. **Mikhalevich** also drew attention to a procedure that allows Belarus to keep information about international searches confidential and called for this possibility to be eliminated through international efforts. **Leanid Marozau** separately warned Belarusians with international protection (asylum) against travelling to Russia, Belarus, and Georgia on the assumption that they would not face persecution there.

Monika Stanisława Płatek said that repression in Belarus resembles a Russian colonial system and that its impact extends beyond Belarusian territory. According to **Ms. Płatek**, it affects the legal systems and businesses of European countries. She also drew attention to what she called "business built on terror" and urged that repressed Belarusians not be turned into instruments of political bargaining.

Joanna Szymańska noted that digital attacks by the regime in Belarus cannot be treated as isolated incidents. At the same time, the international community still lacks sufficient coordination to collect and analyze information about such attacks. As a result, activists and organizations often have to devote significant resources to cybersecurity themselves. Ms. Szymańska called for a unified mechanism to collect information about such incidents, which would make it possible to better assess the real scale of transnational repression.

Leanid Marozau stressed the importance of international mechanisms, including the UN Group of Independent Experts on Belarus. **Monika Płatek** added that the independent UN group of experts is preparing a new report that could serve as a basis for future legal proceedings. She also reported that materials for the International Criminal Court had already been collected. **Uladzimir Labkovich** stressed the importance of the case initiated by Lithuania at the International Criminal Court concerning the regime's transnational crimes and called on other countries to join the process.

In response to a proposal from **Aliaksandra Mamayeva** (Coordination Council) to establish a single joint security service for the democratic forces, bringing together representatives of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office, the Coordination Council, the United Transitional Cabinet, human rights defenders, BELPOL, and the Cyber Partisans, the speakers collectively supported the idea.

Asked about migration authorities refusing protection to Belarusians against the backdrop of an alleged "stabilization" in the country, **Leanid Marozau** noted that the democratic forces regularly provide Polish authorities with documents confirming actual cases of repression. At the same time, he acknowledged that the problem also arises when people seek protection without having any evidence or documentation. According to him, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office is ready to advise and assist such applicants.

Responding to a call from **Kryścina Šyjanok** (Office of Belarus Democratic Forces in the Czech Republic) for more active communication with international partners about hidden forms of repression, **Mr. Labkovich** noted that repression is continuing and that human rights defenders are working to bring information about it to the international community. **Mr. Kupreichyk** recalled the [report by BELPOL and its partners](#) documenting the actual scale of repression.

Back to the USSR or Forward to a New Belarus?

Education. Youth. Future

Belarusian identity is under increasing attack from the ideology of the “Russian World” and the regime’s policy of Russification. This is particularly evident in the education system, which plays a central role in shaping identity. If education in Belarus has become an instrument of state ideological control, a vehicle for colonial narratives and practices, and large-scale repression, how should the Belarusian democratic community in exile respond? Today, the Belarusian diaspora is the only place where Belarusian national identity, the humanities, and culture can be preserved. This is why we need a complete Belarusian-language education system — from preschool to a Belarusian national university. Can the European Humanities University fulfill the role of a national university?

What kind of new university does Belarus need? What role should identity and language play within it? Why do university projects in exile matter? Do the interests of Belarusian youth and the academic community align when it comes to creating a new university? Can Belarusian business become one of the founding supporters of a new university as part of its mission to support the Belarusian nation?

Moderator: Alina Koushyk, *Director of Belsat TV*

Speakers:

Sviatlana Matskevich,
education expert, EuroBelarus

Vadzimir Zarankin,
Chair of the Board of the Association of Belarusian Parents in Lithuania; Senior Program Officer at American Councils for International Education

Andrei Laurukhin,
Deputy Representative for National Revival for Education and Science of the United Transitional Cabinet

Pavel Tereshkovich,
Advisor to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya on Education and Science

Katsiaryna Vasilionak,
media expert

Volha Pavuk,
political activist, teacher

Pavel Tereshkovich stated that the Belarusian education system is experiencing a deep crisis. He noted the growing militarization and ideological indoctrination: more than 600 military-patriotic clubs have been established across the country, while secondary school students undergo military training. At the same time, Russification has intensified: Belarusian-language schools lose between 3,000 and 5,000 students every year, while a network of Russian organizations is expanding across Belarus. He also highlighted the scale of repression in the education system: over five years, around 13,000 teachers have left the profession, while the number of university lecturers with academic degrees has declined significantly.

Andrei Laurukhin agreed with this assessment and added that the quality of education directly depends on the people working in the system, while political loyalty has become the main criterion for selecting staff. He noted that psychological screening of teachers had been introduced to identify those deemed insufficiently loyal to the authorities. In his view, it is impossible to develop the country’s human and social capital under such conditions.

Volha Pavuk separately highlighted the problem of isolating children from the outside world. She said that some teachers had effectively become instruments of state ideology, while the education process was increasingly focused exclusively on Belarus and Russia. According to Ms. Pavuk, military themes had entered school curricula, while state youth organizations had adopted a hostile attitude towards learning English. As a practical measure, she proposed creating a portal for parents offering psychological and practical support, as parents are the ones bearing the burden of raising children in opposition to this system.

Vadzimir Zarankin disagreed with the view that preserving national identity is now possible only in the diaspora. He noted that children in Belarus continue to study the Belarusian language, literature, and history, although providing such education is much more difficult for parents in exile. Mr. Zarankin also spoke about efforts to preserve the Francysk Skaryna Belarusian Gymnasium in Vilnius (Vilnius Pranciskaus Skorinos Gymnasium). He said that mobilization by parents, with support from Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Office, had prevented new migration rules from blocking the enrollment of children in the first grade of Belarusian-language education. He called for Belarusian to become a language of science, technology, and diplomacy and for young Belarusians to be supported in successfully integrating into their countries of residence. At the same time, he pointed to a shortage of modern Belarusian textbooks and called for the development of new educational materials in Belarusian.

Andrei Laurukhin supported the idea of creating alternative digital educational materials on history, literature, philosophy, and law. He also called on donors to support long-term institutional projects rather than short-term grants lasting only a few months.

A separate part of the discussion focused on the European Humanities University. Its graduate **Katsiaryna Vasilionak** criticized EHU, saying that she had enrolled in 2021 as a university in exile where the overwhelming majority of students were Belarusians. According to her, the university has since lost this status and no longer provides adequate protection for its students. Ms. Vasilionak argued that EHU can therefore no longer be considered a Belarusian university in exile and does not fulfill its mission of developing civil society.

Andrei Laurukhin disagreed with the current approach to resource allocation, noting that donors favor funding EHU, providing it with around €3 million annually. According to him, this has resulted in many other educational initiatives effectively ceasing operations by 2026. Mr. Laurukhin also pointed out that Belarusians had gradually been pushed out of EHU's leadership: the number of faculties had fallen from five to two, while no Belarusians remained in the university's senior management.

Sviatlana Matskevich argued that EHU could continue to operate in its current format. At the same time, she stressed that a single institution cannot counter the large-scale militarization and ideologization of education. In her view, the problem is broader: of approximately 150 educational initiatives abroad, no unified educational ecosystem has yet been created. She also pointed to insufficient resources for establishing the Astafiej Vaľovič Belarusian Research University and other educational initiatives. Ms. Matskevich identified three priorities in education: building an independent academic community, training specialists for future reforms, and significantly reducing functional illiteracy through the work of the media, opinion leaders, and civil society.

Pavel Tereshkovich called EHU a "colonial university" and urged donors to reduce funding for ineffective training programs and strategy sessions and redirect resources towards practical educational projects. At the same time, he acknowledged that change at the university remains possible if representatives of the democratic forces, academics, and students join its governing bodies.

During the Q&A, **Tatsiana Krapinevich**, a mathematics teacher, noted that many educators continue to work honestly despite pressure from the system. She also highlighted the lack of adequate legal assistance and funding for the recognition of diplomas held by Belarusian teachers who have moved abroad. Andrei Laurukhin responded by proposing the creation of an "education ambassadors" program that could provide legal support to Belarusian educators abroad, as well as a dedicated assistance fund.

Belarusians: A Nation Without a State?

Social Support. Mobility. Legal Procedures

The Belarusian state has ceased to fulfill its basic obligations to a significant share of its citizens and, in many cases, has itself become a source of threat. As a result, Belarusians have been forced to build elements of their own social protection system beyond the state and across national borders. Can we move from fragmented solidarity initiatives to a transnational Belarusian social protection system that serves both people inside Belarus and Belarusians abroad?

Moderator: **Katsiaryna Yerusalimskaya**, *journalist and presenter at Malanka Media*

Speakers:

Aliaksandr Klachko,
*former volunteer fighter,
co-founder of the Roskvit
initiative by the KUS
charitable organization*

Alvina Minhazava,
*Free Belarus Center lawyer,
former attorney*

Siarhei Drazdouski,
*human rights defender, Office
for the Rights of People with
Disabilities*

Dzmitry Yahorau,
*representative of the BYSOL
Foundation*

Veranika Stankevich,
Coordinator at Volnyja

Alena Aharelyshava,
*social scientist, expert on
gender issues and women's
rights, co-founder of
FemGroup Belarus*

Volha Zazulinskaya,
*Representative for Social
Policy at the United
Transitional Cabinet*

Veranika Stankevich opened the discussion by focusing on support for former political prisoners. According to her, release is only the beginning of a long rehabilitation process, as people often leave prison after lengthy sentences with serious health problems and psychological trauma, without documents, a profession, or knowledge of the local language. She stressed that Belarusian society has managed to build its own independent support system for former political prisoners and their families, and that this model should be preserved and expanded to other vulnerable groups. She added that in 2026, the initiative had focused on career guidance, retraining, and language courses to support the full professional integration of those released.

Aliaksandr Klachko said that systematic support for former volunteer fighters and their families is largely absent and relies mainly on private fundraising. Establishing such a system is made more difficult because European donors mistakenly do not view volunteers as a "humanitarian case." He pointed to the lack of compensation for the families of fallen Belarusian volunteers from Ukraine, the absence of legal veteran status in Poland and Lithuania, and the unknown fate of the Belarusian prisoners of war known as "Kliashch" and "Trombli." Mr. Klachko called on people to support **fundraising campaigns** for the needs of the fighters. Moderator **Katsiaryna Yerusalimskaya** added that Lithuanian society remains wary of volunteer fighters and that this barrier needs to be addressed through work with local politicians.

Volha Zazulinskaya agreed that the situation of volunteers deserves greater attention and noted a positive shift in discussions of the issue over the past two years. She said that joint efforts had

secured grant funding for the administrative capacity of the Veterans' Association and the Roskvit initiative, as well as free vision correction for volunteers in Kyiv.

Siarhei Drazdouski said that having a disability significantly complicates every aspect of exile, while European refugee legislation is designed around the image of a "young and able-bodied" person, leaving people with disabilities "invisible" to local systems. He said there was a need for a social coordinator or guide similar to the long-term support system for former political prisoners. He also noted that relevant organizations inside Belarus had been purged of human rights defenders, while Belarusians abroad still face a psychological barrier: because they do not know the local language, they often do not seek assistance even when they are entitled to it.

Alena Aharelyshava noted that one-third of Belarusian families are headed by single mothers and that repression has only worsened this situation. She added that women face emergency evacuation and the "second shift" of childcare, while men are often forced to take physically demanding jobs to earn a living. Regarding harassment and domestic violence, she called on the democratic forces to openly condemn violence and encouraged survivors to seek help from local shelters and Belarusian organizations.

Alvina Minhazava highlighted the increasingly critical problem of expired passports. Without valid documents, people lose jobs, bank accounts, and the ability to travel, while employers may threaten them with dismissal. She added that activist pensioners face questions from Poland's ZUS social insurance institution over their employment records, and lawyers help challenge such decisions in court. She also noted a decline in donor funding for legal assistance. At the same time, she reassured the audience that the situation with refusals of international protection is not as critical as it may appear in the media, while urging people to submit better-substantiated applications and seek legal advice when necessary.

Dzmitry Yahorau said that the BYSOL Foundation continues to support people affected by repression, although promoting anonymous fundraisers for people inside Belarus has become more difficult as audiences have become less trusting of anonymous names, even though such security measures remain necessary. He said the foundation receives more than 1,000 donations every month, with an average donation of €30. Regarding the limits of assistance, Yahorau explained that BYSOL's mandate covers only emergency assistance to people directly affected by repression, which is "only a drop in the ocean." He added that people often leave prison with severely damaged health and are unable to perform physical work, meaning that a €1,000 payment cannot solve their long-term problems. As a way to address these challenges, he pointed to "radical transparency": reports on all 1,500 fundraising campaigns are available in the foundation's archive, alongside real stories of successful assistance.

At the end of the discussion, **Volha Zazulinskaya** added that a unified referral system for assistance already exists on the websites of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the United Transitional Cabinet, while organizations refer applicants to one another when necessary. The Raionka project has also been launched, and regional information centers are planned. She stressed that the main obstacle to providing assistance today is declining mutual trust and accusations within the community. It is therefore important to preserve unity and remember the root cause of these problems: repression.

Achieving the Impossible

Media. Audiences. Research

Independent media and researchers are working under conditions of comprehensive censorship, financial pressure, and audience fatigue. The key challenge is how to safely reach people inside Belarus while effectively countering Russian propaganda. This panel will explore new collaborative approaches, innovative ways of delivering information, and how to maintain connections between Belarusians on both sides of the border.

Moderator: Volha Loika, *Editor-in-Chief at Plan B, former political prisoner*

Speakers:

Pauliuk Bykouski,
media expert

Andrei Bastunets,
*Chair of the Belarusian
Association of Journalists*

Stsiapan Putsila,
founder of NEXTA

Katsiaryna Andrejeva,
*journalist at Belsat, former
political prisoner*

Andrei Bastunets spoke about the unprecedented and daily pressure faced by independent media in Belarus. He noted that virtually all major independent media outlets, as well as the Belarusian Association of Journalists itself, have been officially designated by the authorities as “extremist formations.” Criminal prosecution of journalists continues: around 100 media professionals have been placed on international wanted lists, and many face transnational repression. Despite these difficult conditions and constant danger, Mr. Bastunets particularly highlighted the high level of solidarity, exceptional resilience, and ability to continue work demonstrated by Belarus’s independent media sector.

Pauliuk Bykouski supplemented this with audience data, saying that independent media continue to reach large audiences inside Belarus: 31.9% of the urban population report consuming their content. Between autumn 2024 and autumn 2025, the number of views of independent media content increased to 448 million, up by 168 million, driven by short videos on TikTok and YouTube Shorts. He added that 92% of their loyal audience does not support the war, while 67% have a pro-European outlook. Supporting the sector, he stressed, is therefore an important investment in the region’s information security.

Katsiaryna Andrejeva focused on security and ethics, noting that more than 20 media professionals remain imprisoned in Belarus, while those released face pressure on their families. She pointed out that around 80% of Belsat’s audience watches from inside Belarus and proposed developing a new ethical security protocol for media outlets in exile, including voice alteration and blurring identifying details in videos. She identified funding as another major challenge facing the sector. At the same time, she called for exploring content monetization opportunities and developing projects for young journalists.

Stsiapan Putsila said that donor funding is declining or stagnating, making the efficient use of every euro a key priority. He agreed that audiences are increasingly moving to social media, with TikTok and YouTube leading the shift. As examples, he cited the Nexta Live and Nexta Plus projects, which lead Russian-language YouTube in terms of views. In July alone, Nexta’s Belarusian channels generated 40 million views from inside Belarus.

Moderator **Volha Loika** mentioned the issue of Russian media influence, noting that Russian projects can attract Belarusian media professionals with higher salaries and better funding. **Artsiom Brukhan** (Coordination Council) then asked about the broader influence of Russian media in Belarus. In response, **Pauliuk Bykouski** acknowledged their influence but noted that, proportionally, Belarusian media have a much stronger influence within Belarus than Russian liberal media do within Russia.

Commenting on journalist **Taras Tarnalitski's** question about the sector's staffing crisis and journalist and former political prisoner **Kseniya Lutskina's** call to support released journalists, **Andrei Bastunets** spoke about educational programs such as the "Saturday University." However, he added that shrinking funding is forcing newsrooms to cut staff and preventing them from hiring new employees or colleagues released from prison. From the audience, **Alina Koushyk** of Belsat added that the channel seeks to employ former political prisoners but called for stronger international lobbying for funding for the Belarusian media sector.

