



POLICY BRIEF

THE SECURITY RISKS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

WAYS OF MINIMIZATION

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The policy brief was prepared within “Russian and Belarusian Studies” Program of the Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” and presented at the Ukrainian Central European Forum with the support of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Representation in Ukraine. The views expressed are the sole responsibility of the Ukrainian Prism and do not necessarily reflect the position of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Representation in Ukraine.

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Summary

- After the beginning of the large-scale aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the strategic importance of Belarus, which remains the only Russian formal ally in Europe, has significantly increased. Due to this, there is a need to increase attention and efforts of Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania aimed at reducing Russian influence in Belarus and creating prerequisites for possible democratic transformations.
- Since 2020, the regime in Belarus has gradually turned from unstable and unpredictable into a threat to all its neighbors, except the Russian Federation. Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania experienced deterioration of relations with Belarus. However, this process had different dynamics.
- Today, the policy of the Lublin Triangle member states is limited by both internal and external factors and is based on reactions to possible threats coming from Belarus. This creates a need to review the approach to Belarus, especially considering the regional dynamics after February 24, 2022, and develop a comprehensive strategy. Such strategy should consider cooperation with civil society, influence Belarusian officials, and strengthen coordination within the Lublin Triangle.

Introduction

In 2021, Belarus became a source of destabilization and hybrid threats for Poland and Lithuania. An artificially created migration crisis forced these two states to protect their eastern borders. Lukashenka's actions were provoked not only by the increased dependency on Moscow, but also by his belief that the protests in 2020 were backed up by the West¹. This was fueled by the fact that neither Poland nor Lithuania recognized Lukashenka as a legitimate president; on the contrary, both countries started cooperating with the Belarusian opposition and later introduced sanctions against the Lukashenka regime².

Bach then, Ukraine was not affected by the crisis because of a less rigid initial position towards Belarusian autocrat. Despite the fact that the official Kyiv did not recognize Lukashenka as a legitimate president, Ukraine was not in favor of supporting Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya or backing down on flourishing trade relations³.

However, the situation has changed significantly with Minsk's complicity in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This not only deepened the political crisis in Belarus' relations with Poland and Lithuania but also caused a significant deterioration of relations with Ukraine. Since then, the position of the three countries towards the Republic of Belarus can be characterized as permanent deterrence.

All three states had to react not only individually but also at a regional level. Within the framework of the Lublin Triangle, three member states condemned the involvement of Belarus in the aggression against Ukraine and underlined the importance to strengthen international sanctions against Belarus⁴. The need for cooperation between the members of the Lublin Triangle can be seen on the example of joint actions of Poland and Lithuania towards Belarus. Both states together with Latvia quickly reacted to the deployment of the "Wagner Group" in Belarus, outlining the possible reason for the border sealing. In addition, Warsaw and Vilnius have been playing a pivotal role in strengthening European sanctions against the Lukashenka regime⁵.

Nevertheless, the threats have not ceased to exist, and each of the three states is trying to take further steps toward Belarus accordingly. The next section of the paper is devoted to the evaluation of policies of Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania in relation to Belarus, considering the existing threats. The latest can be separated into three levels. The first is characterized by attempts to penetrate into the territory of the neighboring states. Migrants regularly try to break through Lithuanian and Polish borders even after the active phase of the migration

¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/17/belarus-president-closes-western-borders-puts-army-on-high-alert>

² <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2020-09-18/vilnius-cancels-lukashenka-lithuanias-policy-belarus-crisis>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54090389>

³ <https://thinktanks.by/publication/2022/03/02/kak-torgovala-belarus-s-ukrainoy.html>

⁴ <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/spilna-deklaraciya-premyer-ministriv-ukrayini-respubliki-polshchata-litovskoyi-respubliki>; <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/joint-statement-prime-ministers-ukraine-republic-lithuania-and-republic-poland-lublin-triangle-meeting-results>

⁵ https://censor.net/ua/news/3429459/polscha_i_lytva_namagayutsya_posylyty_sanktsiyi_prot_y_bilorusi

crisis was over; similarly, the presence of the “Wagner Group” in Belarus shows that the situation on the Eastern borders can escalate at any moment⁶.

The second one is related to the actions of the Lukashenka regime in the nuclear realm. A newly built Belarusian nuclear power plant is located just 50 kilometers from Vilnius. Lithuania urged in every possible way to stop the commissioning of the power plant because safety concerns. After the election fraud in 2020, Estonia and Latvia joined Vilnius in its boycott of Belarusian electricity. When opportunities to export electricity were lost, the Astravets NPP poses a potential danger to its neighbors and satisfies Aliaksandr Lukashenka’s desire to be a leader of a nuclear state⁷. Deployment of Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons in Belarus, even under the Kremlin’s control, serves the same goal⁸. Besides Lukashenka’s personal ambitions, it is a psychological operation to blackmail Western countries and provoke anti-war sentiments in the West. If it had been a question of military needs, nuclear weapons would have been deployed without any publicity⁹.

The third level refers to military threats. For Ukraine in the conditions of war, the issue of the potential opening of the northern front and the renewal of missile attacks from Belarus is the most acute. Unlike the hybrid threats that the Lukashenka regime poses to Poland and Lithuania, the security challenges for Ukraine are immediate. Moreover, the Lukashenka regime is engaged in strengthening Russia’s military potential. In addition to the transfer of heavy weapons to Russia, enterprises of the Belarusian military-industrial complex produce high-tech military equipment and repair and modernize equipment that was damaged in the battles or removed from the storage warehouses¹⁰.

⁶ <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/44396.html?tg=3>

⁷ <https://www.svoboda.org/a/30819135.html>; <https://lenta.ru/news/2020/11/07/yader/>

⁸ https://t.me/Hajun_BY/7349

⁹ <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-06-06/russian-nuclear-weapons-deployed-belarus-consequences>

¹⁰ <http://prismua.org/7548679-2/>

1. Analysis of policies of Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania towards Belarus

1.1. Ukraine

Prior to the beginning of the large-scale invasion, Ukraine was generally implementing the provisions of the foreign policy strategy in relation to Belarus, using trade as a means to prevent restriction of the state sovereignty of Belarus by the Russian Federation¹¹. However, after Belarus became a bridgehead for Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine changed its approach to the Lukashenka regime. Diplomatic relations between the two countries are currently on hold, especially after the firing of Belarusian and Ukrainian ambassadors. Trade relations deteriorated as well. In the first quarter of 2023, imports hovered around USD 5.5 million compared to USD 836.7 million in the first quarter of 2021¹².

Despite all the negative tendencies in the bilateral relations, Ukraine has not established closer ties with the Belarusian opposition. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya did not have official meetings with Ukrainian high-ranking politicians, and her proposal to Volodymyr Zelenskyy to establish an alliance with democratic Belarus was ignored¹³. On the other hand, Kyiv supported the formation of Belarusian volunteer units, in particular, the Kalinousky Regiment, which later obtained political ambitions.

Taking into account a lack of cooperation with the Belarusian diaspora, and a lack of clear strategy towards Belarus, Ukraine's policy has gaps that should be eliminated to enable Ukraine to push forward a wider range of initiatives.

First and foremost, Ukraine downplays the role of Belarus in the Russian invasion and abstains from more goal-oriented actions towards Belarus, despite the fact that Minsk has been providing comprehensive military, infrastructural, and technological support to the Russian Federation¹⁴. This is probably due to the fact that communication with Minsk takes place through intelligence services in order to influence Belarusian military and political leadership and prevent the emergence of additional threats¹⁵. The details of negotiations are, of course, unknown, but it seems that certain verbal political agreements between Minsk and Kyiv were established, and in the framework of these agreements both parties outlined which actions are mutually unacceptable.

Although Ukrainian politicians regularly mention the importance of democratic transformation of Belarus, in practice they show reluctance to cooperate with the Belarusian opposition. The establishment of closer contacts between Kyiv and the Belarusian opposition may be one of possible red lines that the Lukashenka regime has drawn for itself. This can explain critical statements of some Ukrainian politicians regarding the activity of the

¹¹ <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/4482021-40017>

¹² <https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2023-05/pidsumky-zovnishnyoi-torgivli-tovaramy-ukraine-v-i-kvartali-2023.pdf>; <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-economy/3254101-bilorus-opustilas-na-some-misce-sered-torgivelnih-partneriv-ukraini-minekonomiki.html>

¹³ <https://malanka.media/news/22506>

¹⁴ https://t.me/Hajun_BY/7446

¹⁵ <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2023/05/16/7402495/>

Belarusian opposition and blocking of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's participation in joint events¹⁶. Refusal to cooperate with one of the centers of the Belarusian democratic movement reduces the weight of official Kyiv in solving the Belarusian issue and also prevents the acquisition of a coordinating role in relations between two main groups of influence within Belarusian democratic forces.

Ukraine assigned a narrow political role for the Kalinousky Regiment, which is an obstacle to its further development and institutionalization. There is no doubt that the Regiment does not have the ability to seriously influence the situation on the battlefield since it is a rather small combat unit. Therefore, official Kyiv sees the Belarusian volunteers as a political asset, which is one of the factors of deterring Lukashenka¹⁷. However, by assigning a narrow role to the Regiment, Ukraine imposes significant restrictions on their further development and on the process of institutionalization¹⁸.

Ukraine does lack an appropriate information policy that could shape a coherent picture of the situation in the Republic of Belarus. The lack of expert assessment of relations with Belarus and somewhat one-sided media coverage of events in the neighboring country led to the identification of Belarusians and Russians, as well as the emergence of logical collisions in the views of Ukrainians. For example, 86% of Ukrainians are convinced that Belarus should pay compensation to Ukraine, while according to 76% of respondents, the neighboring state is occupied¹⁹.

A clear migration policy has not yet been established in relation to Belarusian citizens. In addition, some Belarusians who used to live in Ukraine were forced to leave the country because of the problems with legalization. Today, many have blocked bank accounts and have problems extending the validity of their permanent or temporary residence permits²⁰. Problems with legalization not only prevented the formation of the Belarusian diaspora in Ukraine on such a scale as in Poland or Lithuania but also negatively affected the replenishment of the ranks of Belarusian volunteer formations in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, particularly the Kalinousky Regiment²¹. There are quite a few cases when Belarusian volunteers, after demobilization, are forced to move abroad, even illegally, because of a lack of opportunities to continue their legal residence in Ukraine²².

¹⁶ <https://focus.ua/uk/politics/549734-ne-bachimo-sensu-v-zelenskogo-rozpovili-chomu-ne-rozvivayut-stosunki-z-opozyciyeyu-u-bilorusi>; <https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/31279.html>

¹⁷ <http://prismua.org/9916305-2/>

¹⁸ <https://reform.by/kabanchuk-predlozhil-sozdat-belarusskij-batalon-v-brigade-imeni-ostrozhskego>

¹⁹ https://activegroup.com.ua/2023/08/29/ukrainci-vvazhayut-bilorus-okupovanoyu-ale-ochikuyut-na-kompensaci-vid-nei/?fbclid=IwAR1sl3tcbo3ISdO5WfN2vJ0bwqm-TTr2a_4WvyleV6jOgSoQGGvXASuFYhl

²⁰ <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belarus/20366.pdf>

²¹ <https://reform.by/kabanchuk-predlozhil-sozdat-belarusskij-batalon-v-brigade-imeni-ostrozhskego>

²² <https://www.dw.com/ru/est-li-dla-belarusskih-dobrovolcev-mesto-v-ukraine-posle-sluzby-v-vsu/a-64291637>

1.2. Poland

Poland's foreign policy strategy adopted for 2017-2022 has expired recently²³. Thus, in April 2023, the head of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Zbigniew Rau presented to the Sejm a report on foreign policy priorities. Probably, this report will become the basis for a new strategy for the upcoming 5 years. In his speech, the minister outlined the risks that Belarus poses for Poland and also assured that Warsaw will continue to support Belarusian independent civil society, including media, refugees, students, and entrepreneurs, in order to achieve the democratization of Belarus²⁴.

It can be expected that Warsaw's line in relation to Belarus will not undergo drastic changes. Thanks to a well-planned migration strategy, a large Belarusian diaspora has formed in Poland, numbering at least 300,000 people. Migration is facilitated by a simplified legalization procedure, in particular, the introduction of humanitarian residence permits. In addition, the Polish government introduced programs for entrepreneurs from the Eastern Partnership countries, scholarship programs for Belarusian students, etc.

Warsaw plays an important role in supporting the Belarusian democratic forces which goes beyond meetings of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya with high-ranking Polish politicians. The Belarusian opposition closely cooperates with the Polish authorities on various issues, for example, in the context of holding accountable those suspected of committing crimes in Belarus. The appointment of the Special Envoy of the Polish MFA for cooperation with the democratic forces of Belarus makes cooperation even more effective and signals that Warsaw is ready for a long-term support of Belarussian opposition.

However, opposite trends can be spotted in Warsaw's relations with the official Minks, which worsened even more after the beginning of Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine. This happened because of Belarus' support of Russian aggression, confrontational historical politics, repressions against the representatives of the Polish minority, and security threats. Despite a deep political crisis in relations with Belarus, indicators of overall trade turnover between the two states have not undergone radical changes. Supplies from Belarus to Poland decreased by a third, but the flow of goods from Poland remained at previous levels. In the first 11 months of 2022, the volume of trade turnover with Belarus amounted to more than USD 2.5 billion²⁵. This tendency has not changed in 2023, when in the first half of the year, Polish exports to Belarus increased up to 40% compared to 2022²⁶.

Although Poland was effective in terms of building a competent migration policy and significantly contributing to the institutionalization of the United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus, its actions aimed at increasing pressure on the Lukashenka regime in the international arena and gaining influence in the process of democratization of Belarus face some problems of mainly external nature.

²³ <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/news/2023/04/18/7160047/>

²⁴ <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/media9.nsf/files/MPRA-CQUBZR/%24File/Information%20on%20the%20principles%20and%20objectives%20of%20Poland%E2%80%99s%20foreign%20policy.pdf>

²⁵ <https://nmn.media/yearbook/get/yearbook2023.pdf>

²⁶ <https://nashaniva.com/ru/325122>

Being one of the biggest advocates of the Belarusian issue at the European level, Poland is dependent on partners in the decision-making process. The last package of sanctions adopted by the European Union is to a large extent the merit of Warsaw, which had been advocating increased pressure on Minsk for several months²⁷. An obstacle to the realization of Poland's intentions at the European level is a complex decision-making procedure in the European Union and a lack of consensus within the EU regarding the synchronization of anti-Russian and anti-Belarusian sanctions approaches. Thus, because of differences in the views of certain EU member states, as well as the desire not to tighten the sanctions noose around Lukashenka's neck, Minsk managed to avoid enlistment in the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth packages of sanctions which targeted only the Russian Federation²⁸.

Despite the fact that Belarus is one of the most sanctioned states in the world, its complete economic and political isolation has not been achieved. Differences in the positions of some EU member states do not contribute to the sealing of the sanctions policy in relation to the Lukashenka regime and its greater isolation. Moreover, some of the Western states, such as Hungary, South Korea, or Israel, maintain relations with Belarus at approximately the same level as before²⁹. In addition, Minsk has managed to minimize political and economic losses thanks to a reorientation to the East, which is not limited to rapprochement with Russia but also includes intensified efforts in Asia, Africa, and Latin America³⁰.

Poland closely cooperates with the United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus, but it cannot establish the same level of relations with the Kalinousky regiment. An obstacle to Warsaw's leadership role in the Belarusian issue is the fact that Poland has limited mechanisms to facilitate the unification of the two main centers of Belarusian democratic forces: the United Transitional Cabinet and the Kalinousky Regiment. Despite the fact that the mobilization center of the Kalinousky Regiment is located in Poland, due to the formal affiliation of the Regiment with the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Warsaw cannot explicitly cooperate with its representatives on its own³¹.

1.3. Lithuania

After the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Lithuania in 2020, the country's Seimas adopted a resolution on foreign policy directions. The resolution confirmed Lithuania's firm resolve to do everything possible to ensure democratic elections in Belarus with the EU's political and financial assistance to democratic and economic reforms in Belarus³². Lithuania became one of the most active players in the Belarussian direction right after the events of 2020, which was reflected, in particular, in close cooperation with the team of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who had conducted several meetings with a number of high-ranking

²⁷ <https://jedynka.polskieradio.pl/artykul/3217173.Ambasador-Sado%C5%9B-dla-Polskiego-Radia-sankcje-UE-wobec-Bia%C5%82orusi-to-propozycje-Polski>

²⁸ <https://nmn.media/yearbook/get/yearbook2023.pdf>

²⁹ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/2023-04-04-western-policy-belarus-astapenia.pdf>

³⁰ http://prismua.org/belarus_foreign_policy/

³¹ <https://gazetaby.plus/post/est-novobrancy-kotorye-imeyut-ochen-nuzhnye-specia/194828/>

³² <https://urm.lt/default/ru/vneschnaaaa-politika/osnobjnye-dokumentjy/rezolyutsiaa-sejma-lr-o-naprableniaah-bneschnej-politiki-litobskoj-respuvliki>

politicians³³. In addition, before the large-scale invasion of Ukraine, Lithuania had been providing comprehensive support for Belarusians. Scholarship programs for Belarusian students, assistance with relocation, and activity of some non-profit organizations from Belarus were helpful during the process of acclimatization in a new environment³⁴.

On the other hand, relations with the official Minsk are so bad that both countries recalled their ambassadors and downgraded diplomatic relations with each other. Lithuania erected a fence barrier at the border with Belarus and closed two border crossings³⁵. Despite the political crisis between the two states, trade relations have not undergone such drastic changes. In 2022, exports from Lithuania to Belarus amounted to almost EUR 1.5 billion, while imports from Belarus were estimated at almost EUR 800 million³⁶. The situation has not changed in 2023, when in three quarters of the year exports from Lithuania to Belarus amounted to EUR 1.3 billion³⁷. Similarly to the case of Poland, the decrease in the amount of Lithuanian imports from Belarus can be vividly seen. Compared to 2021, supplies from Belarus to Lithuania decreased by a third³⁸.

Although Vilnius has been playing an active role in the advocacy of the Belarusian issue both within the EU and in cooperation with its closest partners, Lithuania faces certain problems in the implementation of its policy.

First of all, it is worth paying attention to the relations with society. **After more than two years of favorable Lithuanian policy towards Belarusians, they are now perceived as a threat.** Due to the significant increase in the number of Belarusians in a small Baltic country, social tension has emerged. Russian-speaking Belarussians are often perceived as more pro-Russian, especially after Lithuanian intelligence reported that a well-known Belarusian activist Olga Karach cooperated with Russian security forces³⁹. Moreover, Lithuanians are somewhat suspicious of Belarusians who arrived in Lithuania after 2020-2021. Representatives of this group are considered economic migrants, since most activists left Belarus before 2021. As a result, there is a tendency to separate Belarusians into “good” ones, who arrived in Lithuania earlier, and “suspicious” ones who arrived after the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine⁴⁰. The growth of negative attitudes towards Belarusians may force them to leave Lithuania, which endangers the infrastructure of cooperation with the Belarusian opposition on the one hand and Belarusian society on the other.

Although after the events of 2020, Lithuania tried to become a leader in coordinating the actions of the West in relation to Belarus, it **lacked diplomatic influence to unite the actions**

³³ <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/the-international-role-of-lithuania-towards-the-crisis-in-belarus/>

³⁴ <https://isttravel.ru/index.pl?act=NEWSSHOW&id=2021082101>; <https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/2052650/snachala-etap-idealizatsii-potom-demonizatsii-belorusy-rasskazali-kak-oni-integriruiutsia-v-litve>; <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belarus/19509.pdf>

³⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/lithuania-closes-two-belarus-border-crossings-2023-08-16/>

³⁶ <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/informaciniai-pranesimai?articleId=11081197>

³⁷ <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/informaciniai-pranesimai?articleId=11573529>

³⁸ <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/informaciniai-pranesimai?articleId=10153108>

³⁹ <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2059686/belarusian-activist-karach-cooperated-with-russian-special-services-lithuanian-intelligence>

⁴⁰ <https://newbelarus.vision/iron-curtain-dilemma/>

of all Western states⁴¹. As a result, Vilnius faces the same problem as Poland, namely the impossibility to promote some initiatives at the European level because of a complicated decision-making procedure in the EU. In particular, it is noticeable in attempts to achieve the inclusion of Belarus in sanctions packages, which is not always supported by the EU members and even Ukraine⁴².

⁴¹ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/2023-04-04-western-policy-belarus-astapenia.pdf>

⁴² https://twitter.com/RikardJozwiak/status/1613466506993565698?ref_src=twsrc%5etfw%7Ctwcamp%5etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5e1613466506993565698%7Ctwgr%5ebcac717897b494664f9f583de09fb5bdd86f4d50%7Ctwcon%5es1_%ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fnas.haniva.com%2Fru%2F307417

Conclusions

The political situation inside Belarus and its relations with the external world did not arise and do not exist in a vacuum, therefore the fate of Belarus will largely depend on the results of the Russian-Ukrainian war. If Russia wins, there will be practically no chance for positive changes, whereas Ukraine's victory and weakening of the Russian Federation may create a window of opportunity for democratic transformations within Belarus.

Today, the only actor who has a direct influence on the situation in Belarus is Lukashenka. In conditions of the aggravation of relations with all neighboring states, except Russia, and the regional isolation of Belarus, the mechanisms of influence on the Belarusian leadership are limited. Communication on the most pressing issues can be partially conducted through closed channels, but it is impossible today to discuss a wider range of problems with the Lukashenka regime.

In this case, it is necessary to proceed with creation of the infrastructure of influence in relation to Belarus, which will include maintaining and strengthening the capabilities of Belarusian democratic forces, finding contacts with those Belarusians who have not left their country, finding ways to influence Belarusian local elites and officials of lower and middle levels to provoke the stratification of Belarusian elites and to possibly undermine cooperation between Minsk and Moscow.

Policies of Ukraine and the EU member states should not limit themselves to engagement with Belarusian democratic forces nor with the current Lukashenka regime; they should be broader and more active. This will make them sufficiently dynamic to mitigate negative impacts while leveraging new opportunities, which could prove crucial for Belarusian society and for the whole region. If Ukraine and its partners manage to expand the range of tools for indirect influence on the Lukashenka regime, then when the right moment comes, all the developments may become the basis for changing the status quo inside Belarus.

Recommendations

The interests of Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania largely coincide when it comes to reducing risks coming from Belarus. In order to create the prerequisites for democratic transformations in Belarus, **it is necessary to strengthen the capabilities and competence of the Belarusian democratic forces, as well as to create an infrastructure of influence aimed at low-ranked and middle-ranked Belarusian civil servants.** This includes the revitalization of cooperation within the framework of the “Personnel Reserve” program, in particular, through available study visits and trainings and launching internship programs for the new generation of future managers, as well as establishing contacts between representatives of local authorities with local elites in Belarus.

For Ukraine, it is important to start cooperating with the United Transitional Cabinet. In such way Ukraine can coordinate centers of Belarusian democratic forces and promote the institutionalization of the Kalinovsky Regiment. Establishing cooperation between Ukrainian political elites and all the centers of the democratic movement of Belarus can potentially create prerequisites for their unification and the realization of complementary potential. Concurrently, the deployment of the Belarusian battalion as a part of the Grand Hetman Kostiantyn Ostroghski Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade, as well as granting of special status to Belarusian volunteers, in particular in the context of receiving officer ranks, would have a positive impact on the information component and combat capabilities.

Ukraine and Lithuania need to reassess their migration policies and abolish the number of restrictions that prevent the arrival and stay of Belarusians in these countries. This especially concerns Ukraine, where bureaucratic obstacles are the most serious. It is necessary to introduce clear conditions and procedures for entry and obtaining residence permits for Belarusian citizens, to allow them to carry out a wider range of financial transactions and unblock bank cards, as well as to simplify the procedure for obtaining Ukrainian citizenship for Belarusian volunteers.

Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania should look for ways to influence those Belarusians who have not left the country yet. One of the possible options is to establish cooperation with the diaspora for the implementation of joint initiatives aimed at conveying alternative positions to those who still remain in Belarus. Considering the fact that the majority of Belarusians abroad maintain contact with relatives, friends, or colleagues, the diaspora can become one of the sources of truthful information and influence on those citizens whose views are undergoing transformation.

Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania need to be ready to increase both pressure and incentives. It would be more appropriate to slightly change the approach to advocating the implementation of sanctions at the European level, focusing more on the introduction of restrictions against Russian companies with Belarusian assets and Russian companies cooperating with Belarusian enterprises. In parallel, it makes sense to develop and deliver to Lukashenka a confidential “roadmap” of possible concessions the regime could make and how Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania would react to such actions. Maintaining the exchange of signals would allow the three states to track the mood of Lukashenka and to have both a deterrence and a delaying tool in the case of escalation.



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