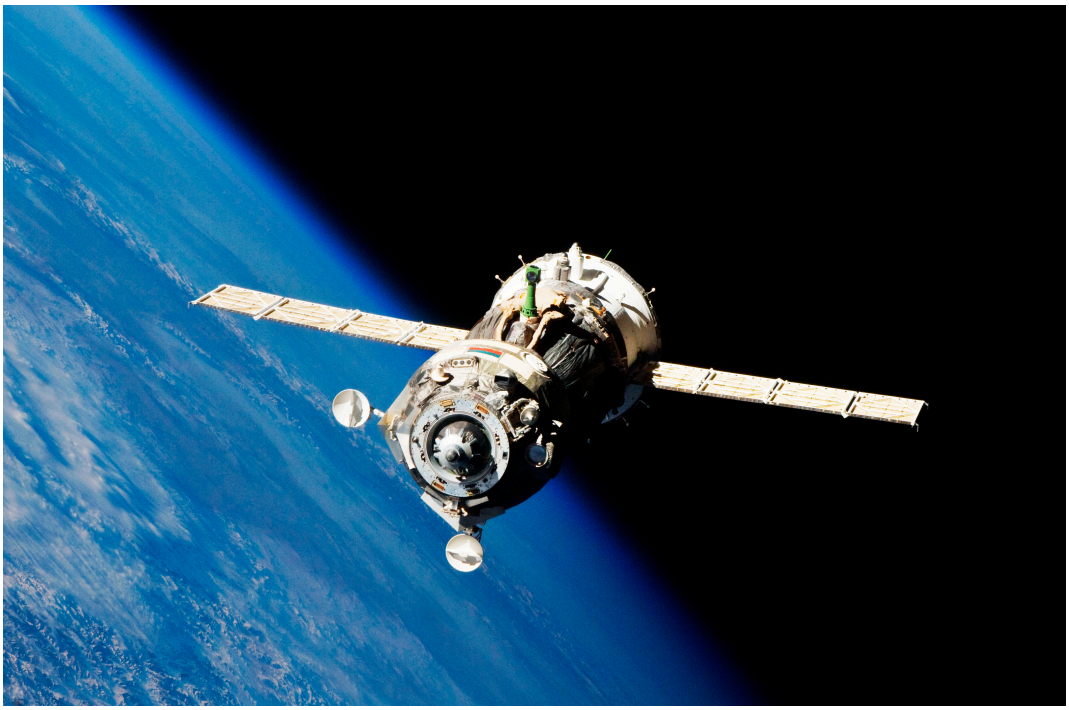
# Belarus one year after 2020 protests: What to expect?




## Redatto da:

Kaitlyn Rabe - Director of Mondo Internazionale G.E.O.
Ana Negurita - Head Researcher Economic Area
Matteo Bulzomì - Senior Researcher Politics Area
Giulia Tessadri - Senior Researcher Politics Area
Matteo Restivo - Senior Researcher Culture & Society Area
Matteo Edoardo Gobbo - Junior Researcher Economic Area

Mondo Internazionale
Associazione culturale Gallarate,
Via Marco Polo 31 21013 - VA,
Italia
C.F. 91071700123
P.IVA 03727710125

Mail: segreteria@mondointernazionale.com

# INDEX


1 Belarus: Historical Background from WWI to Lukashenko

2 A Breakdown of the 2020 Elections

3 General Overview: Belarusian Society, Economy, and Connections to Russia

4 Lukashenko's Opponents: The Reaction of the West

5 Conclusions

# Mondo Internazionale - G.E.O.

Mondo Internazionale - G.E.O. is a hub for geostrategic analyses. Thanks to an innovative and integrated analysis methodology, G.E.O. offers a detailed overview of plausible international scenarios: its focus is the definition of contexts and the study of processes. Mondo Internazionale G.E.O. was originally born from the need to develop an appropriate strategy culture within Italy and Europe. In fact, Mondo Internazionale G.E.O. effectively insists on the implementation of information quality and reliability, so that institutions and the citizenry might benefit and, as a consequence, ameliorate their decision-making process. Mondo Internazionale G.E.O. takes fruitful advantage of its researchers' expertise over a wide range of fields, the availability of modern technologies and an holistic approach to research that takes into consideration social, environmental, economic, geographic, and political factors. Mondo Internazionale G.E.O. is working hard so that it might acquire a noteworthy reputation and help institutions and companies obtain appropriate geostrategic analysis.

**Abstract**

This paper provides an analysis of Belarus's current situation. The 2020 presidential elections are considered extremely important for Belarus, since the protests that followed are considered the biggest in Belarusian history and showed a popular desire for change. More than a year has passed since the elections and Lukashenko still plays an important role in the relations between Belarus, Russia, the European Union and the United States. Recently, the topic of migrants crossing the border between Belarus and the neighboring European countries has been exposed. In order to properly understand the 2020 election, the analysis also focuses on what led to Lukashenko's victory. Specifically, the role played by the fall of the Soviet Union and the foundation of modern Belarus and its economic background are investigated. Moreover, the role played by Russia and the EU in Belarus' foreign and domestic policies is investigated, since these countries have greatly influenced the situation, and potential future scenarios are proposed.

## 1. Belarus: Historical Background from WWI to Lukashenko

The name 'Belarus' has long been used to address the territory lying between Poland and Russia. A few theories have been raised to explain the etymology of such a name; nevertheless, the debate is still ongoing. Up to the beginning of last century, no independent Belarusian state had ever existed, as the country was part of Lithuania and subsequently Russia. The outbreak of WWI and the Russian Revolutions of 1917 became a turning point for Belarus; in late 1917, several ethnic, economic and territorial leaders founded the Belarusian National Council, which was tasked with creating the main institutions of the new state. On 25 March 1918, the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR) was proclaimed to be an independent state. From the very beginning, the Belarusian leadership had to cope with the lack of recognition by both Germany and Russia and with the difficulties of managing a state-building process in the middle of a war. More in particular, the Communist leaders in Russia refused to recognise the BNR, as they were supporting local communist leaders in their attempt to establish a Soviet-like state. At the beginning of 1919, the Red Army managed to occupy the region, forcing the BNR government into exile and establishing the Bielorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Despite the difficulties of operating outside their national territory, the leaders of the BNR never recognised the Soviet State and kept close contacts with Western states (European Holocaust Research Infrastructure).

At the beginning of WWII, Belarus acquired the territories east of Poland out of the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement, under which Germany and the Soviet Union committed themselves to non-aggression and to a division of Polish districts between states. In 1941, however, the German Wermacht invaded the USSR, with Belarus being one of the main frontlines. Moreover, Belarus was the theatre of multiple German war crimes, the most famous of which being the extermination of the Jews; between 600.000 and 900.000 Jews coming from all across the German-controlled Soviet territories were slaughtered between 1941 and 1944 (European Holocaust Research Infrastructure). Further massacres were perpetrated against the Polish and Roma minorities of the country, but an exact figure of such losses is still unclear (Kotljarchuk, 2013). In the very same period, some 374.000 people joined the many partisans groups that mushroomed all across the country, including Belarusians, Poles, and Jews (Ioffe, 2015). Many of them later helped the Red Army during Operation Bagration, a massive military offensive aimed at liberating Belarus and invading Germany from the East. By the end of WWII, 1.9 million Belarusians had perished, bringing the population to 20% of its antebellum levels, and many cities and villages had been destroyed (Belarus Digest, 2012). Despite the pushes from the BNR leadership to create a new independent state on the ashes of the war, Stalin made sure that Belarus remained a Soviet republic.

Following reconstruction, Belarus became one of the main industrial districts of the USSR, specialising in heavy industry. The region suffered massive damages from the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, with its southern districts being heavily contaminated. Still today, cancer mortality among children is a very remarkable issue in Belarus (UN Courier, 2000). In the same period, USSR's Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika policy, albeit intended at reforming the Soviet Union, weakened the already stagnant socio-economic conditions of the Soviet Union. In those years, many nationalist movements gained their momentum all across the Eastern bloc, leading many countries to ask for independence; such was not the case of Belarus, whose relationship with Russia had always been very tight. Nevertheless, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country found itself able to decide its future, being sandwiched between a European Union on its path to enlargement and a weakened but appealing Russia. Among the first steps in the creation of the country was the co-founding of the Commonwealth of Independent States, an interstate organisation that includes many countries from the former Soviet space. The only Belarusian leaders that rejoiced the fall of the Soviet Union were those belonging to the BNR; indeed, a debate among the BNR leaders started about whether it was the case to terminate their exile and participate in the state-building process (needless to say, their vision was quite pro-West.)

*a. The rise of Lukashenko*

Under the Soviet Union, Lukashenko was the head of a state farm and in 1990 he was elected as deputy. Despite this, he was not very well known in the country and the establishment did not consider him to be a threat. However, in 1993, after being nominated as head of an anti-corruption committee and following a speech in which he denounced corruption, he gained more importance. Thus, in 1994, while running for the presidency, he obtained 81% percent of the votes (Journal of Democracy, 2020). Following his election, Lukashenko began an autocratic process: state media underwent strong censorship measures, while the independent radio stations and newspapers were closed. In addition, he also changed (through a referendum) the flag, adopting the previous Soviet one. The rise of the authoritarian regime prevented the BNR leaders from returning to the country and recognising the new government, and to this day the BNR

is the oldest existing government in exile (National Post, 2021). Moreover, in 1996, Lukashenko also closed the Parliament, creating a legislature, and adopting a new constitution that enabled him to increase his powers; by doing so, he has been the President of Belarus since 1994. It is widely proven that none of the subsequent elections were fair or free. In all the elections (2001, 2006, 2010, 2015 and 2020) Lukashenko obtained between 77 and 84 percent of votes, while the opposition's highest result was 16% (Journal of Democracy, 2020).

In 2001, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe questioned the credibility of the elections. Simultaneously, a wave of protests took place in Minsk, with hundreds of people refusing to accept Lukashenko as their new-old president (CNN, 2001). Three years later, a referendum was held to permit Lukashenko to serve an unlimited number of mandates. Once again, protesters took to the streets, facing severe abuse by the security apparatus. Subsequently, the EU imposed the first sanctions on the country (ABC News, 2006). In 2006 the elections were widely contested, as there was clear evidence of fraud. The opposition organized protests, considered to be of historical importance, in which citizens demonstrated against the result of the elections. The protests lasted almost a week until the detention of many participants and the arrest of the opposition leader Aleksandr Kozulin, a prominent opposition leader. Kozulin's arrest caused thousands of people to protest again. The success of some so-called "colour revolutions" in the post-soviet space, namely the "Rose revolution" in Georgia and the "Orange revolution" in Ukraine, played an important role in raising awareness of the Belarusian opposition. As a result, protesters started expressing their dissent not only by joining marches but also by showing symbols related to the anti-Lukashenko sphere. This protest wave was named the "Jeans revolution" after some opposition figures asked all their fellow protesters to wear jeans to recognise each other (ABC News, 2006). Once again, the EU deliberated that Belarus be sanctioned.

Furthemore, in the 2010 elections, strong protests took place after the result of the election was announced, setting a new record in Belarusian history for the number of participants in a protest, as the spread of the internet made it easier to organise sit-ins and let people from all across the country know what was happening in Minsk (ABC News, 2006). The growth in the protests led to an increase in the use of force displayed by the state's apparatuses; moreover, the opposition candidates Uladzimir Niakliaeu, Mikalai Statkevich, Andrei Sannikau and Ryhor Kastusiau were arrested. In a particularly shocking case, Niakliaeu was hospitalized after sustaining injuries due to being beaten and was arrested from the hospital.

The very turning point was the 2020 elections, when, for the first time, large-scale protests took place all across the country. The high media exposure of the marches as well as of the exceptionally violent response from the regime seemed to indicate that the Lukashenko era was over. Many figures from the media, military, industrial, cultural and political world expressed solidarity for their fellow citizens on the streets, pushing Lukashenko to a marginal position. The President responded by blaming the opposition for serving external powers' interests and increasing the violence of the repression. Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, Lukashenko's adversary in the election, was forced to self-exile in Lithuania, causing outrage among the international community. However, Russia's intervention in favour of his neighbour seemed to be decisive for Lukashenko's future. After moments of tension between the two leaders, Putin affirmed his commitment to defending the stability of the Belarusian regime, as it belongs to Russia's 'near abroad' (Chupryna, 2020). As far as repressive policy is concerned, it is worth mentioning that, until the last elections, the main target of the repression were political opponents, journalists and activists (Nationalities Papers, 2021). Between 1999 and 2000, four political activists disappeared and, as mentioned above, a great amount of violence was displayed during the

protests of 2006 and 2010. Moreover, Lukashenko was able to not let individuals considered as threats become too powerful. Thus, despite data showing that Lukashenko's approval rate was decreasing, especially among the younger population, in 2020 the levels of social mobilization reached were not expected. The two failed attempts at change of government in 2006 and 2010 presented some differences from that of 2020: prior to 2020, the opposition mainly relied on nationalist politicians, thus excluding a great number of Belarusians. In 2020, on the other hand, most of the opposition leaders presented themselves as anti-revolutionary, not aiming at another 'Color Revolution', as happened in numerous post-Soviet countries. Moreover, the choice of two liberal candidates--Babaryko and Tsepkalo--to run for the presidency shows the increase in dissatisfaction within the middle and higher class.

For these reasons, it is possible to notice a change in the features of opposition leaders and in the population, whose growing dissatisfaction was already clear before the elections, but even more so after. Although the 2020 elections were not the first fraudulent ones, many Belarusians (a great number never having been involved in political activism) have demanded a change, a transfer of power to democracy and the end of Lukashenko, thus abandoning their prior behavior of resigned acceptance (Nationalities Papers, 2021).

*b. On the Fence: Belarusian relations with Russia and the EU*

In terms of foreign policy, Lukashenko rapidly aligned his country with Russia, signing many important agreements such as the Union State of Russia and Belarus (1999) and the Eurasian Economic Union (2015). The former is aimed at creating a confederation between the two states, that should end up developing a common currency, armed forces, and institutions, while the latter is aimed at creating a common economic space involving virtually all the countries of the Eurasian space.

Nevertheless, Lukashenko has always kept an eye on Europe; despite much criticism, Belarus joined the EU's Eastern Partnership in 2009 (subsequently suspended in 2021). Moreover, when Russian troops seized Crimea in 2014, Lukashenko purposefully maintained an ambiguous position toward the annexation in an attempt to not harm relationships with Ukraine, Russia or the EU (Carnegie Moscow Center, 2018). Consequently, in this case, the country was not involved in the various sanction rounds on and from Russia.

Over the years, two factors have contributed to ensuring Lukashenko's power: the 'vertical of power' system and the support coming from Putin's Russia. Both of them, however, involve a set of advantages as well as disadvantages. The vertical of power is a popular rule system among post-Soviet regimes that is a consequence of the communist period. When Soviet states became independent, almost all of their economic assets were state-owned. In some cases, successful privatisation campaigns managed to introduce the free market systems. In other cases, such as that of Belarus, the state still holds a remarkable part of such assets. Consequently, the state controls an immense portion of the labour market and the authoritarian government of Lukashenko uses the control of the labour market as a tool of power. Indeed, the regime managed to create an unofficial 'social contract' according to which jobs in the public sector are offered in exchange for consensus. The public sector, which represents around 80% of the labour market share, guarantees its employees a low-but-stable income as well as access to healthcare and welfare (Baturchik, Chubrik, Haiduk, Glambotskaya, et al, 2009: 21).

Not surprisingly, the economic collapse of many post-Soviet states persuaded the people of Belarus to rally around their president in order to avoid a similar scenario. In any case, such a stable level of wellbeing is explainable only through

the second pillar of Lukashenko's power: the relationship with Russia. In fact, Belarus' eastern neighbour is the country's main commercial partner, receiving almost all of its agricultural products and the majority of its industrial products (Korostoleva, 2009: 334). Moreover, Russia subsidizes Lukashenko's healthcare and welfare system, otherwise never able to walk on its feet. As said before, such a system contains some elements of fragility. The 'vertical of power' was revealed to be successful as long as a large part of the economic sectors accepted Lukashenko's leadership. During the 2020 protests, many key figures from Lukashenko's traditional consensus base expressed solidarity with the opposition, shaking the system from within (Raam Op Rusland, 2020). Overall, Belarusian relations with Russia have been marked with ups and downs over the years, such as in 2007, 2009 and 2015, when Belarus attempted to pursue an independent foreign policy and Russia threatening the economy of the country.

## 2. A Breakdown of the 2020 Elections

Due to previously mentioned factors, such as popular engagement in protests and the entrance of more 'liberal' candidates into Belarusian elections, 8 August, 2020 is an important date in Belarusian history; indeed, the 2020 elections have entered history due to the massive protests over the election of Lukashenko for his sixth term and claims of election rigging. The 2020 elections presented three main candidates besides Lukashenko: Viktor Babaryko, a banker, Sergei Tikhanovsky, a blogger, and Valery Tsepkalo, a former diplomat and founder of Belarus High Technologies Park (HTP). Viktor Babaryko was arrested with his son Eduard, who was working in his electoral campaign. He was accused of crimes related to tax evasion, money laundering on a massive scale, and bribery based on the Criminal Code; his trial began in February 2021 and in July he was condemned to 14 years in jail.

When Tinkhanovsky announced his race for the presidency, he was arrested and consequently unable to submit documents to register as a candidate (Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights Center Viasna, 2020). His wife Svetlana Tsikhanovskaya decided to run for president in his place. After his detention ended, Sergei took part in Svetlana's electoral campaign, but was again arrested soon after. His charges are related to "deliberate actions aimed at inciting other social discord, calls for the commission of violent and aggressive actions in relation to law enforcement officers", a charge under Art. 13 and. Art 293 of the Criminal Code related to "preparations for mass riots", and other charges (Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights Center Viasna, 2020). His trial began in June 2021 and he is facing up to 15 years in prison.

Valery Tsepkalo was excluded from being a candidate, since the Central Election Committee (CEC) did not recognize some of the signatures collected in order to register him as a candidate. Although he appealed in court, the decision was ultimately upheld. Fearing detention, he fled Belarus before the elections. Moreover, out of 55 people who presented the documents to register their nomination group, the CEC allowed only 15 to register (Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights Center Viasna, 2020).

The lack of individuals being able to run for the presidency created an absence of strong figures opposing Lukashenko; despite this, there was an increase in the public's desire for change, free elections and democracy. After the rejections of

the three main candidates, three women took the lead: first of all, as previously mentioned, Svetlana Tsikhanovskaya, who was allowed to register and run as president[1], second, Maria Kolesnikova, manager of Babaryko's campaign, and third, Veronika Tsepkalo, wife of Valery Tsepkalo. The three women, despite not being politicians, joined forces in order to present a strong and united front against Lukashenko. Their only goal was to win the election, in order to free political prisoners and to eventually have free elections. The reaction of the citizens was very strong, as seen in the great amount of people who participated in the pickets[2], a remarkable fact considering that there has historically been distance between citizens and politics, leading to the Belarusian citizenry not usually being politically active.

Despite the exit polls, which predicted Tikhanovskaya to strongly lead, Lukashenko won the elections, reportedly obtaining 80% of the votes, while Tikhanovskaya received only 10% of the votes. Nevertheless, Tikhanovskaya claimed to have received around 60-70% of the votes (Ispi, 2020). It is widely proven that there was election rigging, and indeed, many international election monitors did not receive permission[3] to observe the elections and count votes, and the final results were not published in a great number of polling stations (Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights Center Viasna, 2020). These behaviors clearly show lack of transparency, which is an essential aspect for free elections, and the opaqueness of the process demonstrates the willingness of the authorities to falsify the results. Moreover, in order to ensure a clear voting process, Tikhanovskaya had requested that her electors register on an online platform (thus showing the extreme unlikeness of a Lukashenko victory), to vote later in the afternoon and to wear white bracelets, identified as the symbol of her campaign (Nationalities Papers, 2021). The early closure of the polling station, while citizens were still waiting for their turn to vote, shows the clear intention to diminish the opposition (Nationalities Papers, 2021). The improbably high numbers of votes obtained by Lukashenko led to mass protests all over Belarus, especially in Minsk; indeed, around 200,000 citizens gathered in the capital, in order to protest against the election results. The event very likely became the biggest political event in Belarus since 1991 (Nationalities Papers, 2021).

The protests, which were peaceful overall, faced extreme violence from the state's army and police, involving the use of riot equipment, stun grenades, water cannons and weapons against the citizens participating in the protests (Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights Center Viasna, 2020). In addition to the violence of the state's forces, the demonstrations were followed by mass detentions (also of people who happened to be on the scene accidentally), and the Interior Ministry reported that by August 12 more than 6,000 citizens had been detained, although the number was likely much higher (Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights Center Viasna, 2020). Moreover, the Ministry of Health reported that more than 200 people required hospital care only in the first two days of the demonstrations and, according to human rights defenders and doctors, more than 1,200 people required hospital care in the days following the elections (Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights Center Viasna, 2020). In addition to that, two people died as a result of the use of weapons against protesters[4]. Despite the violence displayed by the state and the recurrent

[1] It is very likely that Tikhanovskaya was register as a candidate, thus being able to run for presidency, as she was not perceived as a threat, due to her background, the lack of a political experience and being a woman (Lukashenko underlined that politics is not for women).
[2] It is estimated that more than 60,000 people joined Park of People's Friendship in Minsk on July 30, 2020, in order to side with Svetlana Tikhanovskaya's electoral campaign.
[3] The official reason of the lack of authorization was the Coronavirus pandemia.
[4] One person died as a result of not receiving proper health care, due to serving an administrative detention, related to the participation in the demonstrations.

use of torture, many months later citizens were still protesting in the streets against Lukashenko's government and the election, even with the risks of being detained and losing their jobs. Related to the protests, all the symbols of the opposition movements, such as the white-red-white flag and items with these colors, are banned (see section IIa).

In regards to the opposition, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya was forced to leave the country the day of the election and Veronika Tsepkalo fled the country as well, while Maria Kolesnikova decided to lead the protests and the opposition while on the territory. On August 14, the Coordination Council was established in order to facilitate the transfer of power. A great number of members of the Coordination Council were arrested or forced to leave the country; for example, Maria Kolesnikova was arrested after refusing to forcibly leave Belarus and was sentenced to 11 years in prison. According to the Human Rights Center "Viasna", as of September 2021, there were 715 political prisoners and the number is increasing. 24 journalists[5] were detained, and even members of "Viasna" were held in detention as the authorities were still pressing criminal charges for political reasons (Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights Center Viasna, 2020) .

In the past months, the demonstrations have diminished; nevertheless, there are two important episodes worth mentioning: firstly, the forced landing of the Ryanair flight traveling from Athens to Vilnius and the arrest of Roman Protasevich, editor-in-chief of *Nexta* and *Nexta Live*, a Telegram-based opposition channel. The airplane was forced to land–due to a tip from the Belarusian Transport Ministry that there was a bomb onboard–and escorted by a military jet to Minsk, even though the Vilnius airport was closer. The threat of a bomb was linked to an email allegedly sent by Hamas and, based on further investigation by Belarusian authorities, was claimed to have originated in Switzerland. Hamas opposed the claim, asserting no involvement in the threat: moreover, it was confirmed that the email was sent *after* the Belarusian order to land in Minsk (BBC News, 2021). The charges against Protasevich were related to the organization of mass unrest (due to his activities on the *Nexta* Telegram) and he faces up to 15 years in jail. In addition, Protasevich claimed that he was added to the KGB list of terrorist suspects, and thus facing the death penalty (BBC News, 2021). While in detention a video was released, in which Protasevich admitted the charges and claimed to have been treated fairly and correctly. Despite this, it is believed that there were signs of bruises on his face that were being covered (Amnesty International Italia). On 25 June, it was reported that both Pratasevich and Sapega were under house arrest, the first being in an undisclosed location.

Secondly, on 1 August, 2021, Olympian Krystsina Tsimanouskaya, fearing consequences after making negative remarks against her coaches, refused to return to Belarus. The Belarusian government strongly believes in the importance of sport for the State[6] and, furthermore, the President of the Olympic National Committee is Lukashenko's son (Ispi, 2021). Therefore, standing up against the coaches was perceived as a critique to the government. Tsimanouskaya was able to receive a humanitarian visa in Poland and her husband immediately fled Belarus, fearing for his freedom.

[5] Since the elections, there has been an increase in the persecutions against independent and non-governmental media.
[6] There is a great number of athletes that have been detained due to criticizing the government and the elections. As of August 2021, 95 professional athletes had been detained.

## 3. General Overview: Belarusian Society, Economy, and Connections to Russia

### *a. Belarusian Identity and Symbols in the Protests*

As has already been highlighted, the process of modern nation building in Belarus has been troubled. Moreover, since the 1994 presidential elections brought Lukashenko to power, the prospects for an ethno-national Belarusian state have never manifested. Lukashenko adopted a policy of 'russification', indicating Putin's country as a strategic partner in foreign relations, introducing Russian as a second official language in Belarus with a referendum in 1995, and leading a political elite which conveniently merged elements of the nationalistic historical narrative with Soviet mythology in order to strengthen their regime (Smok, 2013). The result is a 'state ideology' policy: a mix of Soviet and nationalist historical narratives, myths and symbols which serve to legitimize only the presidency. For these reasons, collective consciousness in Belarus is in peril when it comes to determining human behavior and further social development (Shumskaya, 2021). Identity issues, particularly regarding language and the nation's historical narrative, formed the foundation of the persistent cleavage between the authoritarian regime of Lukashenko and its opposition. Belarusian people have lost, and are still losing, their opportunity to produce an accordant version of self-determination, due to its president who is willing to make a subservient and consent-based nation (Smok, 2013). From this standpoint, it is possible to understand why colors – such as red and white – and imagery and symbolism have been constantly deployed during protests following the elections of August 2020.

Modern Belarusian nationalism was one of the most recent to appear on European soil. The BNR, having lived only one year before being caught in the Soviet-Polish War, subsequently watched its territory be captured by the USSR in 1922; the absence of Belarusian nationhood not only existed during the USSR, but has been protracted by the Lukashenko regime. The regime of Lukashenko has actively opposed the establishment of an ethno-national model of state (Smok, 2013). Nowadays, demonstrations are becoming fundamental in shaping a Belarusian identity: the 2020 protests ended up being full of old and suppressed symbols, such as the colors of the Belarusian flag (Norris, 2021).

Meanwhile, the linguistic issue in Belarus is rooted in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, that, when it faded, left the task of building a national identity to replace the Soviet one. Even if the question of national identity seemed to hinge on questions of language for many states, Belarus distinguished itself by keeping Russian as the dominant language (Shumskaya, 2021). However, the short period of *belarusianisation* in the 1990s had a strong effect on society's language preferences. People perceived the renaissance of Belarusian as a natural process, but the policies of the Lukashenko regime reversed it. The role of the Belarusian language in mass media and communication has diminished dramatically over the past decade (Smok, 2013). In fact, although the Constitution of Belarus recognizes an equal status to both languages, it is Russian which dominates all spheres of life. All public bodies provide their services and documentation in Russian with a few minor exceptions; channels that cover economic and political affairs, as well as entertainment and films, broadcast their shows almost exclusively in Russian. Normally, films are never dubbed in Belarusian and those produced in Belarus also use Russian more often. The only sphere where Belarusian continues to dominate is topography, particularly with regards to signs with the official names of villages, rivers and streets in the cities (Smok, 2013). Therefore, the Belarusian language lives in a hostile environment. Civil society is the unique actor who has tried, and still tries, to revive the language and the national identity basis. Independent media has played a leading role in doing work exclusively in Belarusian; many campaigns have started to appear spontaneously as a

reaction to the Russification policies, and were incorporated into the massive protests which erupted in 2020.

For what concerns the national flag controversy, it is necessary to look to the 90s. The red-and-white flag exhibited by the protestors actually served as an official state flag from 1991 to 1995; its use was discouraged after the referendum of 1995 on state symbols that adopted a Soviet-style red-and green-flag, as a part of Lukashenko's plan to eradicate dissent, which was apparently associated with Belarusian symbols. Afterward, use of the red-and-white flag was subject to a fine, and its status as an opposition symbol was cemented (Scollon, 2020). This helps explain the enormous effort of the security forces to limit the colors' manner of usage: social networks were full of videos and photographic material about police dragging flags away, dismantling fence decorations, and banners from balconies. Furthermore, the Internet has spread images about Belarusian protestors' alternative representation of the red-and-white flag: for example, by hanging red-and-white laundry on clotheslines in alternating order, replacing light bulbs in stairwells to form giant red-and-white flags, or students sitting in an arrangement forming a red-and-white flag. It seems that the support for demonstrations is visible anywhere, in red-and-white cars driving down the streets, in athletes wearing red-and-white garb during their training or matches, and also during wedding days when a bride painted a red line down the center of her white dress (Scollon, 2020).

The protests in Belarus are recognized as a 'colorful revolution', not only because of the old nationalist flag, but also thanks to other artistic representations about protests and their protagonists. For instance, the transformation of Chaim Soutine's *Eva* painting into a meme is emblematic: Babaryka–one of the candidates who ran against Lukashenko in the 2020 election and was arrested– purchased *Eva* in 2013, as part of his ongoing efforts to "repatriate" Belarusian artwork. Following Babaryka's arrest, people on the internet were inspired to turn the *Eva* painting into a meme, depicting her in jail or dressed in prison garb (Champion, 2020). Afterwards, Belarusian artists also engaged with the clash by posting numerous representations of Belarusian flag symbolism on social network pages. For example, in the works of contemporary artist Vladimir Tsesler, the green-and-red Soviet-era emblem has entirely negative notes and often presents police violence and intimidation acts. Likewise, Rufina Bazlova's work on Instagram made powerful use of traditional Belarusian folk colors in the form of *vyshyvanka*, a traditional embroidery, weaving in scenes of protest, violence, and historical allusions: the artist explained that it was a specific code for recording information about the lives of people and about the nation (Norris, 2021).

It is therefore important to underline the fact that protests in 2020 seemed not to have appeals to geopolitical or civilizational choice. These demonstrations are rather Belarus-centric by nature (Vasilevich, 2020). Even amid the EU institutions, the general consensus is that the Belarusian revolution is not a geopolitical one; the Belarusians are not choosing between the West and Russia, they are deciding the progress of their national identity. However, it is entirely possible that the protests could assume a geopolitical voice. Probably, the EU is hoping that Russia will replace Lukashenko or at least secure significant constitutional reform, which would make Belarusian politics more competitive and give the EU the opportunity to gradually increase its influence there without an open geopolitical conflict. The protestors have still not propped up other flags than their red-and-white one, but if their columns start unfurling EU flags – like in Ukraine, Georgia and even Belarus itself back in 2010 – then the EU will have to change tactics and adopt a more active policy (Moshes, 2020). Indeed, younger and highly educated people are demonstrating a stronger trend towards integration into an international context–in particular, into the EU–and less connection to specific

territorial or ethnic identities. Younger generations are playing a crucial role in the development of the Belarusian nation, both for its identity and for its foreign relations. They did not undergo Soviet indoctrination or experience its relentless propaganda; hence they look much more democratically minded than their parents (Smok, 2013): perhaps, they will become progressively more used to enjoying EU norms and values.

*b. General overview of the country's economy*

The economy of Belarus, since the times of the Soviet Union, has been linked to the mechanical processing of large machinery, and even after its independence in 1991 it has remained linked to Russia and has not, like some of the neighbouring former USSR satellites, suffered from the privatisation of the public companies by the oligarchs. In fact, the Belarus transition was characterized by limited structural reforms and a humble expansion of the private sector, a consequence of the 'vertical of power' system which partially allows Lukashenko to stay in power.

Nowadays Belarus has one of the most equal income distributions in the world, with a very low GINI index (The World Bank, 2021). In recent years, the economic system of Belarus has been particularly dynamic, as evidenced by GDP growth figures: +2.5% in 2017, +4% in 2018 and +2% in 2019. In 2020, however, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the country's GDP decreased by 0.9% (Italian Government, 2021). Furthermore, in 2020, the Belarus economy also came to a standstill due to targeted sanctions imposed by the European Union (see section III for further details on sanctions). The European Bank estimates that all the economic sanctions are expected to hit the economy later in 2021 and throughout 2022 (European Bank, 2021) and further sanctions may be imposed due to the ongoing dispute between the parties (Lenzu, 2021). Moreover, the economic growth is weakened because of the low accumulation of capital and the public debt ratios to GDP are growing. In regards to the mainstays of the Belarus economy, Belarus is the world's second largest exporter of potash fertilizers, with sales worth $2.8 billion in 2018, following only Canada (The World Bank, 2021).

*c. Foreign influences/Russia*

As previously mentioned, in 1999 the "Union State of Russia and Belarus" was created between the two countries, thus laying the foundations for the creation of a supranational and intergovernmental entity; in fact, the Union allows citizens to move freely between the two nations, with equal rights to work and social benefits. However, for decades, this agreement played only a formal role, with no practical application. For example, customs controls on the common border were re-established in 2001, effectively ending the trade union. Monetary unification projects have also been postponed several times.

In the following years, and in 2007, the situation seemingly stalled again and Lukashenko declared: "The Russian government has asked us to enter the Russian Federation. These are the projects of the Russian leadership. I do not want to destroy sovereignty. and the independence of Belarus" (al Jazeera, 2007). However, the reality has changed in more recent years, with Moscow being Minsk's main economic partner. As reported on the OEC economic data portal, Belarus imported more than 50% of its total goods from Russia in the last 10 years, amounting to a total of 57.2% in 2019, and exported more than 40%, with a peak of 46.3%. in 2016 and 42% in 2019 (OEC, 2019).

Belarus is furthermore dependent on Russia for energy resources and, due to the complicated economic scenario, has lost its negotiation levers, also due to the decisive decrease in Russian oil price subsidies. The shocks that have determined the large change in the price of oil have widened the negative effect on Belarusian exports of refined products. While refineries paid only 50% of the market price for crude oil in 2014, by 2019 they were paying 80%. The new Russian policies on the matter will mean that by 2025 Belarus will pay full price for oil, at a cost that the government has estimated at an additional $10 billion over the next few years. The lack of compensation for the loss of subsidies has contributed to the increase in street protests.

The economic difficulties due to several joint causes, such as Covid, the sanctions imposed by the EU and the reduction of energy subsidies, have created an encirclement to the power of economic and political independence, which in September 2021 led to a new signing of an agreement between Russia and Belarus, resurrecting the idea of the Russian-Belarusian confederation initially signed more than 20 years ago. The 2021 agreement served to increase energy and economic integration with Russia. (Orsini, 2021) The president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, arrived in Moscow on 9 September, 2021 to hold high-level talks with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. On the negotiating table, the two heads of state placed the remaining roadmaps to formalize the "Russian-Belarusian State of the Union".

At least in the initial phase, the agreement seems to be inspired by a cooperation model similar to that of the European Union. The process that Vladimir Putin indicated is the same one that gave birth to the European Community at the time: first economic union, then, on this basis, an ever-closer political union, determined by the Russian foreign policy interests that are leading to a worsening of political - economic relations with the West.

*d. Elections 2020: an economic point of view*

Even though Belarus did not impose a lockdown in order to avoid the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic, the national economy was penalized by the domino effects of recessions in other economies, and for 2020 the IMF has forecasted a significant contraction in GDP (Exportplanning, 2020). The street protests were also decisive for the reduction of economic development due to various factors, such as the precarious socio-economic situation of the country, whose economy has been stagnating for years, as well as the scarce political freedoms and the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, in addition to the possibility of having to restructure the state-owned companies, with the risk of job loss and the welfare that the state now bears.

The Belarusian currency suffered a depreciation in correspondence with the most acute phase of the Covid crisis, in the spring of 2020, following the trend of other emerging currencies and with the generalized flight of investors from risk. After a recovery phase, which lasted approximately until July, the outcome of the elections with the consequent popular reaction catalyzed a new weakening: before the outbreak of the protests, the ruble was exchanged for the dollar at 2.45, a value that reached 2.66 rubles per in August 2020, with a drop of 8.6%. Currently in November 2021, with the frictions with the European Union, the value is stable at 2.47 rubles for $ 1.

The context that led to a blockade of the country due to the street demonstrations led to violent institutional repression. Meanwhile, foreign exchange reserves held by the central bank, excluding gold, amounted to 4.3 billion dollars in July 2020 (Di Rosa, 2020), a value considered to be below the adequacy threshold according to the MFI metrics. The

reserves of the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus have decreased by 35.8% since the beginning of 2020.

### 4. Lukashenko's Opponents: The Reaction of the West

*a. The European Union*

Despite support from Moscow, Lukashenko faces a large wall of actors willing to 'play the long game' in using economic might to squeeze the regime out of power (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). The most interested of the actors, due to geographical vicinity and economic ties with Belarus, is the European Union (and in particular, the EU member states of Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania).

Before the tensions set off by the 2020 elections, the EU had already been utilizing accession to preferential trade agreements and regional organizations as an incentive to move the previous Soviet satellite away from Moscow and toward the West. Beyond Belarus' previously mentioned accession to the EU Partnership in 2009, for example, in 1995 the EU and Belarus concluded the bilateral "Partnership and Cooperation Agreement". Nevertheless, as noted before, Belarus suspended its participation in the former, while the latter still has not yet been ratified due to Belarus' "lack of commitment to democracy and political and civil rights". Consequently, trade relations between the EU and Belarus are still covered by the obsolescent EU-USSR "Trade and Cooperation Agreement" (European Commission, 2021).

Thus, seeing as the 'carrot' approach has not brought Lukashenko to improve his track record on human rights, the EU has begun to opt for 'sticks' in reaction to the Lukashenko regime's escalating levels of aggression. In light of the Ryanair incident alone, the EU has imposed sanctions on 78 Belarusian individuals and 8 entities, restricting the sale of internet and telecommunications monitoring equipment, dual-use technologies for military use, as well as restricting trade in petroleum, tobacco, and potash, upon which the Belarus economy is heavily reliant (European Council of the European Union, 2021). Furthermore, under the new sanctions, The European Investment Bank and multilateral development banks of EU member states are now also required to restrict the disbursement of payments for the development of the Belarusian public sector. Finally, the EU Council banned overflight of EU airspace by Belarusian airlines and prevented access to EU airports by such airlines for "endangering aviation safety" (European Council of the European Union, 2021).

The 'Ryanair sanctions' are the fourth round of such restrictions that the EU has implemented since the fraudulent Belarusian elections of 2020; in total, the number of sanctions now covers 166 individuals and 15 entities (European Council of the European Union, 2021), while the number of goods and services which have been restricted for sale to Belarus by the EU (13) is only outnumbered by the goods and services which the EU has restricted for sale to North Korea (36) and Syria (24) (EU Sanctions Map, 2021).

In retaliation for these sanctions, and in a tactic that several observers have labeled as "hybrid" warfare (Politico, 2021), the Lukashenko regime has begun to facilitate irregular flows of migrants, who arrive to Belarus--mainly from Syria and Iraq--on 7-day "tourist visas" and are permitted to cross the border into the bordering states of Poland, Lithuania,

and Latvia; to demonstrate the immense scale of such flows, Latvia, in July and August of 2021, saw 50 times more asylum seekers than it had seen in all of 2020 (BBC, 2021). As proof of the Lukashenko regime's direct control over such flows, the Polish Minister of the Interior released photographic evidence of Belarusian border patrol guards cutting through barbed wire along the border (Internazionale, 2021), while violent spats have reportedly occurred between the migrants and Polish police (RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty, 2021). Furthermore, Pavel Latushka, Belarus' former ambassador to France and Poland and former culture minister, claimed that the Belarusian government has been training Afghani and Iraqi war veterans to carry out terrorist attacks once they enter EU borders (EU Observer, 2021).

This weaponization of a humanitarian issue, which not only violates the sovereignty that the neighboring countries possess over their borders, but has also resulted in several confirmed migrant deaths and the stranding of many more along the Polish, Latvian, and Lithuanian borders, has brought
Germany, (Ansa, 2021) together with the European Union states on the frontline of the migrant crisis, to consider implementing further sanctions against Belarus. The following are the statements by the Director General of the Migration and Home Affairs Division of the European Commission, Monique Pariat: "Another package of sanctions against Belarus is currently in preparation and will be discussed…, the new sanctions aim to extend those already existing to individuals and organizations that contribute to this exploitation of migration." (Ansa, 2021)

Simultaneously, in Germany, the inauguration of the NordStream 2 gas pipeline, recently completed despite protests from the USA and Eastern European countries and which directly connects Germany to Russia, has been postponed,. The given reason for the block is a procedural quibble concerning the non-certification of the gas pipeline as the company's headquarters are in Switzerland, outside the EU. The postponement of the inauguration led to an increase in gas prices, which, as of November 2021, exceeded 100 euros per megawatt / hour. In spite of cynical attitudes that the European Union is hesitant to effectively exercise disciplinary action against authoritarian regimes, history demonstrates that the EU is very likely to intervene against highly visible human rights violations in non-EU European countries with strong economic ties to the European Union; Belarus--with its gas reserves, borders with EU member states, and highly publicized oppression of internal dissent--demonstrates all three of these qualities, and it is almost certain that the European Union will continue to intervene economically (Kreutz, 214).

*b. The United States*

Furthermore, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has openly declared the United States' intention to stand "in solidarity with [its] Allies and partners" (US Department of State, 2021)—namely, the EU, United Kingdom, and Canada—in facing the threats posed by the Lukashenko regime. On the one-year anniversary of the August 9, 2020 elections, the US Department of the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned 23 individuals and 21 entities who "are involved in the continuing violent crackdown on peaceful protests; are connected to the May 23, 2021, Ryanair incident; or, profit from or sustain the Belarusian regime at the expense of the Belarusian people" (US Department of the Treasury, 2021).

This recent round of US sanctions freezes the property and interests of individuals and entities which the US

Department of the Treasury has termed as "Lukashenko's wallets", individuals and entities who receive preferential treatment by Lukashenko himself in exchange for funds and public support for the regime. The main sectors targeted by the US sanctions are the energy, tobacco, construction, and security sectors, while individuals who are directly connected with the Ryanair incident (for example, Aliaksei Mikalaevich Auramenka, Minister of Transport and Communications) and pro-Lukashenko government officials have also been affected (US Department of the Treasury, 2021).

In retaliation for the sanctions, Lukashenko requested that Washington reduce its Minsk embassy staff to one person, and effective October 17th, 2021, US citizens now require a visa to enter Belarus (RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty, 2021). The United States responded by closing the Belarus consulate in New York City on October 21st, 2021, laying the blame for deterioration in US-Belarus relations directly on the Lukashenko regime and "its inability to allow independent voices to emerge in Belarus as well as its unwillingness to meet its international commitments" (US Embassy in Belarus, 2021).

The growing number of sanctions, as well as the tit-for-tat reduction in diplomatic staff and structures between the US and Belarus is proof of the fact that the United States is willing--and, due to the rather weak economic ties that the US possess with Belarus, is able–to continue to oppose the Lukashenko regime (Belarusian Institute of America). Just as tellingly, the United States has declared its support for its Allies in countering the transnational threats posed by the Belarusian government, and the Department of State has declared that the US "will continue working with the international community to hold account those responsible for human rights violations and abuses in Belarus" (US Department of State, 2021). Furthermore, in regards to the orchestration of irregular migrant flows across the Belarusian border, U.S. Department of State spokesperson Ned Price acknowledged on November 8, 2021 the Lukashenko regime's role in "the political exploitation and coercion of vulnerable people, and the regime's callous and inhumane facilitation of irregular migration flows across its borders" (N. Price, 2021), and called for an end to the orchestration of such migrant flows. Such declarations and actions demonstrate that the United States has only just begun to take action against the Belarusian government, and will be engaged with its transatlantic allies in countering the Lukashenko regime's tactics in the long run.

The EU and the US are not the only actors engaged in opposing the Government of Belarus; the United Kingdom and Canada have also been engaged in announcing sanctions against Belarusian officials, individuals, and entities since the rigged 2020 elections. The progressively multilateral nature of such actions is perhaps the greatest piece of evidence of the fragile, but growing charisma of Lukashenko's opponents, as the sanctions imposed on June 21, 2021 were the first round which the EU, UK, US, and Canada coordinated jointly (Government of Canada, 2021). Furthermore, the rhetoric used by all actors—affirming solidarity with their traditional, transatlantic Allies against the Lukashenko regime—are a sign that Lukashenko's Western opponents are willing to play the long game, not only in defense of open, democratic values, but also in order to counter the regime's threats that have begun to cross international borders.

**Conclusions**

In conclusion, Lukashenko's survival in the current context hinges upon three main questions: if he can maintain the loyalty of the state's security apparatus, if Putin's support will remain eternal and unconditional, and if Belarus will be able to face long-term international isolation. All points, naturally, are intertwined: The first point is most likely dependent on the state's ability to treat the security apparatus properly, as well as Lukashenko's ability to show himself to be a capable leader, and thus, it will be essential to maintain decent economic and living conditions for the security apparatus that brutally defends the current regime. Connected to this point is the fact that Belarus' ability to resist increasing political and economic isolation from 'Western' opponents relies totally upon steady support from Russia; if Vladimir Putin should decide that such a relationship is no longer beneficial, Lukashenko would lose the platform upon which his power rests. Given Russia's historical preference to keep their Eastern neighbors close and, in many cases, dependent upon its own support, such a scenario is unlikely and thus, Lukashenko will most likely maintain Putin's support, at least in the short and medium term, rendering him able to face isolation from the rest of the world.

How likely is it, however, that international opponents will continue to isolate Belarus? Until recently, the European Union has traditionally carried out policies of *realpolitik* in facing the past human rights transgressions committed by Belarus, as the presence of Lukashenko--aggressive as he might be--has always been seen as preferable to a hypothetical Russian occupation of Belarus (Kazharski, 2021). Since the beginning of the 21st century, the EU has preferred to discourage human rights transgressions in Belarus with diplomatic proclamations calling for free and fair elections and engagement through regional organizations. Such a tactic, which EU leaders began to implement in 2009 with Belarus' signing of the Eastern Partnership and ended in 2020 with the first round of sanctions, brought about few fruitful results, mainly due to Lukashenko's--and the Belarusian public's--lack of clear and consistent commitment to either the East or the West (Zogg, 2021).

Historically speaking, however, the EU and its member states are likely to intervene, both militarily and economically, in crises within non-EU European states which demonstrate highly visible human rights transgressions and possess deep economic ties with the EU. Consistent with this hypothesis, the mounting number of sanctions that the European Union has implemented demonstrates that the EU is gaining momentum in countering the dictatorial regime, and some have stated that this is the EU's chance to finally show a bark that matches its bite (Slunkin, 2021). In particular, seeing as there is evidence of Lukashenko's direct control over the irregular migrant flows into Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania, the EU and its member states will almost certainly proceed to impose a fifth round of sanctions (BBC News, 2021). Furthermore, the United States, with its relatively weak economic ties to Belarus and interests in supporting their European counterparts, will find it rather simple to implement further sanctions if the weaponization of migrants continues.

The effects of economic sanctions, however, will be limited precisely due to their large and long-term scope, as the threats presented by the Lukashenko regime, both domestically and abroad, are extremely imminent. Furthermore, Lukashenko possesses an ironic, but essential double-edged sword in facing his opponents: fear for his own survival. Isolation from the West, in the end, is nothing new to Minsk (Kazharski, 2021), but neither is its back-and-forth relationship with Russia. Lukashenko's historically strategic dalliance with Russia derives from Belarus' cultural, economic, and geopolitical dependence on its eastern neighbor, strongly hinting that Lukashenko's habit of turning to

Putin for support, despite Moscow's recent moves away from Belarus, is presumably what he will continue to do in the future, so long as it ensures his regime's survival. Furthermore, the gradual opening of the younger generations toward the EU foresees further protesting which, as long as Lukashenko maintains the loyalty of the national security forces, will continue to be oppressed (Bushuev, Boguslavskaya, 2021).

Thus, despite the West's capacity and willingness to implement further sanctions, such measures are unlikely to change the regime's behavior in the short term and will probably not be effective in mitigating the emergencies both within Belarus and along the EU's border. As tensions continue to rise along the EU-Belarus border, Lukashenko has the incentive of his own survival to continue to engage both in international acts of aggression, such as the Ryanair incident and alleged weaponization of migrants, and in internal oppression (Barigazzi, 2021).

**Information Content**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Confirmed | **Confirmed** by other independent sources; logical in itself; coherent with other information on the topic |
| 2 | Presumably true | **Not confirmed**; logical in itself; coherent with other information on the topic |
| 3 | Maybe true | **Not confirmed**; reasonably logical in itself; coherent with some other information on the topic |
| 4 | Uncertaint | **Not confirmed**; possible but not logical in itself; no other information on the topic |
| 5 | Improbable | **Not confirmed**; not logical in itself; contradicts with other information on the topic |
| 6 | Not able to be evaluated | **No basis to evaluate the validity of the information** |

**Trustworthiness of the source**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | Trustworthy | **No doubt** about authenticity, reliability or competence; has a history of total trustworthiness |
| B | Normally trustworthy | **Small doubts** about authenticity, reliability or competence, nevertheless has a history of valid information in a majority of cases |
| C | Sufficiently trustworthy | **Doubts** about authenticity, reliability or competence; however, has supplied valid information in the past |
| D | Normally not trustworthy | **Significant doubt** about authenticity, reliability or competence, however has supplied valid information in the past |
| E | Not trustworthy | **Lack of** authenticity, reliability or competence; history of invalid information |
| F | Not able to be evaluated | **No basis to evaluate the validity of the information** |

**Bibliography**

Adams, P., "How Belarus is helping 'tourists' break into the EU", BBC News, 22 October, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58952867 (2-B)

Adamushko, V.I., "On the Genocide of the Jewish Population in Belarus Republic during WWII", European Holocaust Research Infrastructure. https://www.ehri-project.eu/content/genocide-jewish-population-belarus-republic-during-wwii (2-B)

Astapenia, R., "Belarusian's views on the political crisis, Results of a public opinion poll conducted between 20 and 30 April 2021", Chatham House, 11 June 2021. https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/06/belarusians-views-political-crisis. (2-B)

Arkady, M., "Belarus Protests Have Explosive Potential for EU-Russia Relations", Carnegie Moscow Center, November 30, 2020. https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/83344 (2-B)

Barigazzi, J., "European defense leaders warn: Belarus migrant crisis could morph into a military crisis", Politico, 10 November, 2021. https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-belarus-border-migrants-military-crisis-defence-leaders-europe/ (3-B)

Baturchik, M., Chubrik, A., Haiduk, K., Glambotskaya, A., et al, "Social Contracts in Contemporary Belarus", Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, Minsk, 2009. http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00006382/01/social_contracts_contemporary_Belarus_en.pdf (2-B)

Bedford, S., "The 2020 Presidential Election in Belarus: Erosion of Authoritarian Stability and Re-politicization of Society", Nationalities Papers, v. 5, n. 49, 2021, pp. 808–819. (2-B)

"Belarus", European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/belarus/ (1-A)

"Belarus–Analysen", Länder-Analysen, n. 57, 27 July 2021, pp. 2-24. https://www.laender-analysen.de/belarus-analysen/56/BelarusAnalysen56.pdf (2-B)

"Belarus: Facing the disaster alone", UN Courier, October 2000. https://en.unesco.org/courier/october-2000/belarus-facing-disaster-alone (2-A)

"Belarus Shuts Down More NGOs Amid Continued Crackdown", RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty, 23 July, 2021.https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-shuts-down-ngos/31374183.html (2-C)

"Belarus threatens to cut off gas to EU in border row", BBC News, 11 November, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59246899 (2-B)

"Belarus: University students expelled from universities and imprisoned for peaceful protest", Amnesty International, 24 May, 2021. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/05/belarus-university-students-expelled-from-universities-and-imprisoned-for-peaceful-protest/ (2-C)

"Belarus-US Trade Relations and Investments", Belarusian Institute of America. http://belarusianinstitute.org/research/belarus-u-s-trade-relations-and-investments/ (1-B)

"Belarus", Amnesty International Italia. https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/belarus/ (1-C)

"Bielorussia: Lukashenko alle corde", Ispi, 18 August 2020. https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/bielorussia-lukashenko-alle-corde-27187. (2-B)

"Bielorussia: Raman Pratasevich a rischio tortura", Amnesty International Italia. https://www.amnesty.it/appelli/bielorussia-raman-pratasevich-a-rischio-tortura/. (2-C)

"Bielorussia-UE: crisi olimpica", Ispi, 3 August 2021. https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/ispitel-bielorussia-ue-crisi-olimpica-31320. (2-B)

Blinken, A., "Holding the Lukashenka Regime to Account on the Anniversary of the Fraudulent Presidential Election", US Department of State, August 9, 2021. https://www.state.gov/holding-the-lukashenka-regime-to-account-on-the-anniversary-of-the-fraudulent-presidential-belarusian-election/ (2-A)

Bohdan, S., "Why Belarus is Missing in World War II History", Belarus Digest, 8 May, 2012. https://belarusdigest.com/story/why-belarus-is-missing-in-world-war-ii-history/ (2-B)

Bushuev, M., Boguslavskaya, A., "Minsk and Moscow: Dependency has its price", DW, 7 December, 2019. https://www.dw.com/en/minsk-and-moscow-dependency-has-its-price/a-51572952 (2-B)

Buzgalin, AV., Kolganov, A., "The Protests in Belarus: Context, Causes and Lessons", Critical Sociology, v. 3, n. 47, 2021, pp. 441-453. (2-B)

"Canada Sanctions Related to Belarus", Government of Canada, 30 August, 2021. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/sanctions/belarus.aspx?lang=eng (1-A)

Champion, M., & Kudrytski, A., "How Eva, a $1.8 million Portrait, Became a Symbol of Protest", Bloomberg, June 29, 2020.
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-29/a-portrait-called-eva-is-belarus-strongman-s-top-election-threat (2 - B)

Chupryna, O., "Lukashenko, Putin and the protests: Why Belarus is being pulled further into Russia's orbit", London School of Economics and Political Science, 2 December, 2020. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2020/12/02/lukashenko-putin-and-the-protests-why-belarus-is-being-pulled-further-into-russias-orbit/ (2-B)

"EU bans Belarusian carriers from its airspace and airports", European Council of the European Union, 4 June, 2021. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/04/eu-bans-belarusian-carriers-from-its-airspace-and-airports/ (1-A)

EU Sanctions Map, 15 November, 2021. https://www.sanctionsmap.eu/#/main (1-A)

Galeotti, M., "Security forces are Lukashenko's strong right arm–and Achille's heel", Raam Op Rusland, 7 December, 2020.
https://www.raamoprusland.nl/dossiers/belarus/1751-security-forces-are-lukashenko-s-strong-right-arm-and-achilles-heel (2-B)

Haski, P., "Alla frontiera polacca una crisi umanitaria orchestrata da Minsk", Internazionale, 9 November, 2021. https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/pierre-haski/2021/11/09/migranti-bielorussia-polonia (2-B)

Haass, R., "Economic Sanctions: Too Much of a Bad Thing", Brookings, 1 June, 1998. https://www.brookings.edu/research/economic-sanctions-too-much-of-a-bad-thing/ (2-C)

Hopper, T., "The world's oldest government in exile is in Ottawa", National Post, 26 May, 2021. https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/the-worlds-oldest-government-in-exile-is-in-ottawa (1-C)

"Human Rights Situation in Belarus: September 2021", Viasna, October 2021. http://spring96.org/en/news/105196 (3-C)

Ioffe, G., "The Partisan Movements in Belarus During World War II (Part One), Eurasian Daily Monitor, vol. 12, The Jamestown Foundation, 30 January, 2015. https://jamestown.org/program/the-partisan-movements-in-belarus-during-world-war-ii-part-one/ (2-B)

Kapustina, O., Sahm: "Staatliche Gewalt ist ein Schritt ins Nirgendwo", Deutsche Welle, 28 October 2020. https://www.dw.com/de/sahm-staatliche-gewalt-ist-ein-schritt-ins-nirgendwo/a-55413729. (3-C)

Karmanau, Y., "Belarus labels Polish-funded TV channel extremist", AP News, 27 July, 2021.

https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-government-and-politics-europe-business-belarus-6d55a365261d2f18fb3aba94a04364cf (2-B)

Kazharski, A., "Belarus and the EU After the 2021 Awakening: Limited Room for Maneuver?", 2021. https://www.rigaconference.lv/wp-content/uploads/WEB_2.Brief-.pdf (2-B)

Korostoleva, E., "Was There a Quiet Revolution? Belarus After the 2006 Election", Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics, vol. 25: 2, pp. 324-346. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13523270902861038 (2-B)

Kotljarchuk, A., "World War II Memory Politics: Jewish, Polish, and Roma Minorities of Belarus", The Journal of Belarusian Studies, vol. 7, 2013: 7-37. http://belarusjournal.com/article/world-war-ii-memory-politics-jewish-polish-and-roma-minorities-belarus-205 (2-B)

Kreutz, J., "Human Rights, Geostrategy, and EU Foreign Policy, 1989-2008", International Organization, vol. 69, 2015, pp. 195-217.. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43283295 (1-B)

Nienhuysen, F., "Lukaschenko vernichtet die nationale Elite", Süddeutsche Zeitung, 15 July 2021. https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/belarus-viktor-lukaschenko-repression-menschenrechte-opposition-sanktionen-goethe-institut-minsk-1.5353413. (3-C)

Norris, S.M., "History, Memory, and the art of protest in Belarus", Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective, The Ohio State University, v. 14, i. 6, March 2021.

https://origins.osu.edu/article/history-memory-and-art-protest-belarus (1-B)

"Poland Reports More Clashes With Migrants Near Belarusian Border; Putin, Merkel Speak Again", RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty, 11 November, 2021. https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-sanctions-poland-border-migrants-eu-/31555966.html (2-C)

Price, N., "Department Press Briefing -- November 8, 2021", US Department of State, 8 November, 2021. https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-november-8-2021/ (1-A)

"Protests at 'unfair' Belarus poll", CNN, 10 September, 2001. https://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/09/10/belarus.poll/index.html (2-B)

"Republic of Belarus. Presidential Election. August 9, 2020 Final report on election observation", Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections, Belarusian Helsinki Committee and Human Rights Center Viasna, December 2020, pp. 1-34. https://elections2020.spring96.org/en/news/100928. (3-C)

Rettman, A., "Belarus 'trained Afghan and Iraqi veterans' for EU border attacks", euobserver, 10 November, 2021. https://euobserver.com/world/153478 (3-B)

RFE/RL's Belarus Service, "Belarus to Close New York Consulate 'At U.S. Request'", Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 12 October, 2021. https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-us-close-consulate/31504785.html (2-C)

Roth, A., "Women unite in maverick attempt to unseat Lukashenko in Belarus", The Guardian, 26 July 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/26/belarus-svetlana-tikhanovskaya-unseat-alexander-lukashenko. (2-B)

Scollon, M., "Flying the Flag: Belarusians Show Their True Colors in Solidarity With Protests", Radio FreeEurope,

September 9, 2020.

https://www.rferl.org/a/belarusians-red--white-flag-protests-solidarity/30829635.html (1-C)

Sector, C., "Belarusians Wear Jeans in Silent Protest", ABC News, 4 February, 2006. https://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=1502762 (1-B)

Semchuk, L. "Belarus: targeting of critics likely to intensify as Lukashenko expands his reach", The Conversation, 4 August, 2021. https://theconversation.com/belarus-targeting-of-critics-likely-to-intensify-as-lukashenko-expands-his-reach-165630 (2-B)

Shraibman, A., "The Lukashenko Formula: Belarus's Crimea Flip-Flops", Carnegie Moscow Center, 6 January, 2018. https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/63698 (2-B)

Shumskaya, I., "Belarusian Identity in the Post-colonial Labyrinths", International Relations and Diplomacy, v. 9, n. 3, 2021. https://www.davidpublisher.com/Public/uploads/Contribute/610cb2778ef89.pdf (2-B)

Slunkin, P., "The EU and Belarus: First steps to flexing European geopolitical muscle", European Council on Foreign Relations, 30 June, 2021. https://ecfr.eu/article/the-eu-and-belarus-first-steps-to-flexing-european-geopolitical-muscle/ (2-B)

Smok, V., "Belarusian Identity: the Impact of Lukashenka's Rule, Ostrogorski Centre Analytical Paper, n. 3, 2013. https://belarusdigest.com/story/analytical-paper-belarusian-identity-the-impact-of-lukashenkas-rule/ (2 - B)

"Sperrt Lukaschenko jetzt seine Athleten ein?", Bild, August 2021. https://www.bild.de/sport/mehr-sport/sport-mix/nach-olympia-thriller-sperrt-lukaschenko-jetzt-seine-ahtleten-ein-77419250.bild.html. (2-D)

Tafuro, Ambrosetti, E., "Bielorussia: le tre incognite per il regime di Lukashenko", Ispi, 28 August 2020. https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/bielorussia-le-tre-incognite-il-regime-di-lukashenko-27207. (2-B)

"Treasury Holds the Belarusian Regime to Account on Anniversary of Fraudulent Election", US Department of the Treasury, 9 August, 2021. https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0315 (1-A)

Treek, J., "Lukashenko threatens EU with gas cutoff as border tensions rise", Politico, 11 November, 2021. https://www.politico.eu/article/lukashenko-gas-threat-eu-belarus-russia/ (2-B)

Troianovski, A., Specia, M., "European defense leaders warn: Belarus migrant crisis could morph into military crisis", Politico, 10 November, 2021. https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-belarus-border-migrants-military-crisis-defence-leaders-europe/ (2-B)

"US Embassy Minsk Statement", US Embassy in Belarus, August 11, 2021. https://by.usembassy.gov/u-s-embassy-minsk-statement/ (1-A)

Vasilevich, H., "Belarusian National Identity: what did the 2020 protests demonstrate?", Regard sur l'Est, October 10, 2020. https://regard-est.com/belarusian-national-identity-what-did-the-2020-protests-demonstrate (2 - C)

Way, L. H., “Belarus Uprising: How a Dictator Became Vulnerable”, Journal of Democracy, v. 31, no. 4, October 2020, pp. 17-27. (2-B)

Zogg, B., “From Belarus with Love: The Limits of Lukashenko’s Dalliance with the West”, War on the Rocks, 3 April, 2019. https://warontherocks.com/2019/04/from-belarus-with-love-the-limits-of-lukashenkos-dalliance-with-the-west/ (2-B)