

**Committee:** Special Political and Decolonization Committee (GA4)

**Issue:** Deescalating the political crisis of Belarus

**Student Officer:** Eleanna Chalaraki

**Position:** Co-Chair

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## PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates of the GA4 Committee,

My name is Eleanna Chalaraki and I am a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student of Ekpaideutiki Anagennisi. It is my utmost honour to serve as a Co-Chair of the Special Political and Decolonisation Committee in the 5<sup>th</sup> session of the American College of Greece Model United Nations. MUN is an outstanding world that I have been part of for 3 years. I cannot help but congratulate you for choosing to be member of it, taking into consideration all the hard work that it takes. It is the ideal activity for all those who desire to broaden their way of thinking while meeting people from multiple cultural backgrounds. My goal as a Student Officer is to share my passion and enthusiasm for this activity with all of you and create the ideal conditions for a fruitful debate.

The present study guide will provide you with important information, key factors, and identified problems on the issue of 'De-escalating the political crisis of Belarus', which concerns Belarus, the European Union, and the international community as well, as it is a direct attack to democracy. Lukashenko's regime has overturned the political stability of Belarus and has provoked heated reactions on the way this crisis should be treated on a small and a large scale. Except for the information that is being provided in this study guide, which will serve as a pretext to your investigation, I highly advise you to extend your research and that you research your delegation's policy thoroughly.

Should you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me via my email ([aehalar@gmail.com](mailto:aehalar@gmail.com)) and I will be more than happy to help you.

Looking forward to meeting you all in April!

Sincerely,

Eleanna Chalaraki

## TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Belarus has been in political turmoil since August 2020. The political instability in Belarus has raised a lot of concerns not only in the neighbouring countries but also on a global scale. Alexander Lukashenko, President of Belarus, has been in power since 1994. He is a close ally of President Vladimir Putin, and has been deemed a dictator by many, throughout Belarus and the international community. <sup>1</sup>During the presidential elections of Belarus in August 2020, the country was gripped by mass protests as the election was widely believed to have been rigged in favor of the long-time leader Lukashenko. On the contrary, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the wife of Syarhei Tsikhanouski, the Belarus' former opposition leader, was the one who gained the support of thousands of people during the campaign. For this reason, a wave of unprecedented mass protests occurred and more than 100,000 people were packed into central Minsk, the capital, for one month since the disputed August 9<sup>th</sup> election. Sviatlana fled the country to Lithuania a day after the vote, under pressure from the authorities and under the fear of being imprisoned.

But the presidential election was just the start of the crisis. In Minsk, on 23 May 2021, a Ryanair flight was forced by the government of Belarus and two journalists were detained. This action was perceived as violent repression of civil society, democratic opposition, and journalists. Nevertheless, the leader Lukashenko did not stop there. In November 2021, several thousand migrants were stranded along the border between Poland and Belarus. The EU has accused Belarus of encouraging migrants towards its borders in retaliation for sanctions on a crackdown on protests last year against Mr. Lukashenko's contested re-election. All these actions prove that Belarus is facing the threat of an authoritarian regime while basic human rights are being violated. So, our goal in this topic of GA4 is to provide effective solutions to stabilize the political situation in Belarus without undermining the country's sovereignty.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

**Asset freeze:** Asset freezing refers to the blocking of bank accounts and other financial assets of persons listed in the EU legal acts.<sup>2</sup> This targeted sanction is mostly imposed on people who are associated with the Taliban, who are responsible for human rights violations or whose activities undermine democracy and destabilize the rule of law. Currently they are approximately 20 such sanctions in place, targeting different

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<sup>1</sup> Roman Goncharenko. "Belarus Strongman Lukashenko Marks 25 Years in Power." *DW*, 10 July 2019, [www.dw.com/en/belarus-strongman-lukashenko-marks-25-years-in-power/a-49530563](https://www.dw.com/en/belarus-strongman-lukashenko-marks-25-years-in-power/a-49530563).

<sup>2</sup> "Asset Freezing." EUROPEAN DATA PROTECTION SUPERVISOR, 2020, [https://edps.europa.eu/data-protection/data-protection/reference-library/asset-freezing\\_en](https://edps.europa.eu/data-protection/data-protection/reference-library/asset-freezing_en).

countries and groups. These sanctions may implement decisions of the United Nations Security Council or they may be imposed by the EU autonomously.

### **Hybrid warfare**

Hybrid warfare is a theory of military strategy, first proposed by Frank Hoffman. It entails an interplay or fusion of conventional as well as unconventional instruments of power and tools of subversion such as fake news, diplomacy, lawfare and foreign electoral intervention.

### **Illiberal democracy**

Illiberal democracy is a governing system in which, although elections take place, citizens are cut off from knowledge about the activities of those who exercise real power because of the lack of civil liberties. In illiberal democracies we often observe ignorance of constitutional limits on power.

### **Retaliatory Sanctions**

Retaliatory sanctions are the sanctions imposed by countries as a measure to harm other countries that have harmed them beforehand.

### **Sham**

Sham is something that is not what it seems to be and is intended to deceive people, or someone who pretends to be something they are not.<sup>3</sup>

### **Sovereignty**

The term of sovereignty is one of the most complicated and controversial ideas in political science and international law. This concept is related to the concepts of state, government, independence and democracy and it refers to the ultimate authority in the decision-making process of the state and the maintenance of order.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **General Information**

Belarus is situated in Europe. It has Russia to the east and Ukraine to the south. To the north and west lie EU and NATO members Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Belarus is a member of the EU's Eastern Partnership, and it has not joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as it is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization under the auspices of Russia. The population of the nation is 9.5 million

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<sup>3</sup> "Sham." *Cambridge*, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sham>.

and it is geopolitically significant at the moment due to it being politically and geographically in the middle of the tensions between Western Europe and Russia. President Alexander Lukashenko has been in power for 26 years and has had President Putin as a close ally, allowing for this long period of power maintenance. Lukashenko was deemed the last dictator of the EU<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, he remains in power by repressing democratic legislations and democratic institutions, keeping the economy in state hands, and using censorship and police brutality against his political opponents.



**Figure 1:** A geopolitical map of Belarus<sup>5</sup>

## 2020 Presidential Elections

Having been in power since 1994, Belorussian citizens have realized that the democratically elected government of Lukashenko has gradually turned into a dictatorship. The suspicions of electoral fraud started in 2006 when the USA and the European Union imposed sanctions against President Lukashenko for cracking down on a peaceful protest for his re-election. However, during the elections in August 2020, there was a sizeable opposition party demanding the reformation of the political system, new democratic leadership, and economic reform. Belarus opposition leader Tsikhanouski was a candidate for the 2020 presidential election and the one that had rallied the support of the people. Nevertheless, two days after he announced his candidacy, he was detained by the police authorities. His wife, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya ran in his place, encouraging thousands of people to support her during the campaign. When the voting day arrived on 9 August 2020, the opposition had widespread fears about possible fraud. These fears seemed to be well-founded as countless irregularities were documented and an internet blackout took place<sup>6</sup>, which lasted several days. Belarus delayed its invitation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to monitor the election until it was too late to arrange

<sup>4</sup> Roman Goncharenko. "Belarus Strongman Lukashenko Marks 25 Years in Power." *DW*, 10 July 2019, [www.dw.com/en/belarus-strongman-lukashenko-marks-25-years-in-power/a-49530563](http://www.dw.com/en/belarus-strongman-lukashenko-marks-25-years-in-power/a-49530563).

<sup>5</sup> "What's Happening in Belarus?" *BBC*, 8 Sept. 2020, [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53799065](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53799065).

<sup>6</sup> LILY HAY NEWMAN. "Belarus Has Shut Down the Internet Amid a Controversial Election." *WIRED*, 18 Aug. 2020, [www.wired.com/story/belarus-internet-outage-election](http://www.wired.com/story/belarus-internet-outage-election).

a mission hoping to avoid criticism for blocking impartial international observers<sup>7</sup>. Based on the exit polls Lukashenko gained 80% of the vote while Tikhanovskaya gained only about 10%. The opposition leader raised concerns and argued that she has ranked 60-70% of the votes. <sup>8</sup>Lukashenko remained for a sixth term in office even though he was rejected by the opposition and described by the West as a sham.<sup>9</sup>

Anger and disbelief dominated in the majority of citizens, and for this reason people took the streets and demanded that the votes be recounted. On the night after the election, violent clashes led to 3,000 arrests in Minsk and other cities.<sup>10</sup> Police with the aim to disperse crowds fired tear gas, rubber bullets, and stun grenades. More and more people participated in the protests and the country resembled a war zone. On the day after the election, Tikhanovskaya tried to complain to election authorities about falsifications of the result. She was detained for seven hours and was obliged to leave for Lithuania, where she had earlier sent her children for their protection. She uploaded an emotional video, apologizing for her leaving as she did it for the sake of her children. On 17 August in a video address, she said she was ready to lead Belarus, pending new fair elections. Mr. Lukashenko reacted with hostility while he refused to participate in any negotiations that underestimate the presidential result.

This reaction produced a new wave of demonstrations. The state responded to these protests with extreme violence, but this seemed to bring more people out onto the streets. Six months later the protests continued. Belarusian security forces in an attempt to stifle the protests, arbitrarily detained thousands of people and subjected hundreds to torture and other ill-treatment. Police detained a lot of journalists, who tried to express the human rights violation and the repression of democracy.

Siarhei Tsikhanouski was detained for a pretrial hearing for more than 18 months. On 14 December 2021, A court in Belarus sentenced opposition leader Siarhei Tsikhanouski to 18 years in prison for “galvanizing an unprecedented protest movement against leader Alexander Lukashenko” the previous year<sup>11</sup>. He was found guilty of organizing riots and inciting social hatred, among other charges. Tsikhanouskaya denounced the verdict. More and more opposition leaders were forced to leave the country or were sentenced to imprisonment as they constitute threats to the authoritarian regime.

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<sup>7</sup> “ODIHR Will Not Deploy Election Observation Mission to Belarus Due to Lack of Invitation.” OSCE, 15 July 2020, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/457309>.

<sup>8</sup> “What’s Happening in Belarus?” BBC, 8 Sept. 2020, [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53799065](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53799065).

<sup>9</sup> C. J. Chivers. “U.S. and Europe Plan Sanctions Against Belarus.” *New York Times*, 25 Mar. 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/25/world/europe/us-and-europe-plan-sanctions-against-belarus.html>.

<sup>10</sup> “What’s Happening in Belarus?” BBC, 8 Sept. 2020, [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53799065](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53799065).

<sup>11</sup> “Belarus Opposition Leader Tikhanovsky Sentenced to 18 Years in Jail.” *France24*, 14 Dec. 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20211214-belarus-opposition-leader-tikhanovsky-sentenced-to-18-years-in-jail>.

### Forced landing of a Ryanair flight

On 23 May 2021, the Belarusian authorities forced a civilian plane to perform an emergency landing in Minsk. The plane owned by an EU company called Ryanair, flying between two EU capitals and carrying more than 100 passengers, was forced to land by a Belarusian military aircraft. Ryanair flight FR4978 was travelling from the Greek capital, Athens, to Vilnius in Lithuania on Sunday 23 May when it made the urgent change of course over Belarus, some 10km from the Lithuanian border.

According to an unverified transcript<sup>12</sup> from the Belarusian transport ministry, the reason of the forced landing was that the air traffic controllers informed the pilot at 09:30 GMT that a bomb was on board, and it was about to be activated over Vilnius. Even though the plane was closer to Vilnius, the pilot was told to land the plane at 09:47 to the Belarusian capital while the pilot declared an emergency. A Belarusian MiG-29 jet was scrambled to escort the plane, which landed at 10:16 GMT (13:16 local time).

Belarus has claimed the flight was diverted because of an emailed bomb threat from Hamas,<sup>13</sup> but the Palestinian militant group denies any involvement. Hamas is a Palestinian nationalist and Islamist movement that is dedicated to the establishment of an independent Islamic state in historical Palestine. However, in this case there are no evidence that justifies this group's involvement. One of the main passengers was the Belarusian journalist Roman Protasevich and Sofia Sapega, a Russian citizen studying in Lithuania. When the plane's 126 passengers disembarked, the police arrested these two people under the accuse of committing crimes against the Belarusian State. The couple visited Greece as Protasevich had taken part in a conference involving Belarusian dissidents in Athens before they spent some time on holiday. He was a journalist in Belarus when in 2019 he was forced to live in exile in Lithuania as he highly opposed the repressive government of his country Belarus.

After this incident the international community did not stay silent, and a lot of concerns were triggered. The European Union has barred Belarusian airlines from flying over or landing in all 27 member states while the UK and the Ukraine reacted similarly. Also, the EU imposed sanctions on 78 individuals that were associated with the forced landing of the Ryanair plane and the imprisonment of the couple.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the Biden Administration announced a wave of sanctions targeting

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<sup>12</sup> By Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber And Andrew Osborn. "They Say Code Is Red': Transcript of Controller Telling Plane to Land in Minsk." *Reuters*, 25 May 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/they-say-code-is-red-transcript-controller-telling-plane-land-minsk-2021-05-25/>

<sup>13</sup> "Belarus Plane: What We Know and What We Don't." *BBC*, 25 June 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57239521>.

<sup>14</sup> European Council. "Restrictive Measures against Belarus." *Council of the European Union*, 2 Dec. 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-belarus/>.

Belarusian individuals and entities tied to the arrest of an opposition journalist in coordination with Canada, the UK and the European Union<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, Russia, the closest ally of the Lukashenko, continued to support him, confirming that Russia would move ahead with a second \$500m (£352m) loan to Belarus in June.<sup>16</sup>

### **Border crisis with Poland, human rights abuses and weaponisation of immigrants**

Since June 2021, thousands of immigrants, mainly from Iraq, but also from Syria Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon and several other countries, have tried to reach the European borders via Belarus. While the Belarusian government has eased the flow of immigrants, it has also urged them to cross illegally the borders and get access into the EU. In response, EU countries trying to defend their borders, they have built fences and have significantly increased border control, declaring their countries in a state of emergency. In this way, independent humanitarian assistance organisations have restricted access to these borders.

The crisis began sometime around July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021, when Lukashenko threatened the EU with the illegal influx of human traffickers, drug smugglers, and armed migrants<sup>17</sup>. During December 2021, an estimated 2,000 people were staying in a makeshift camp near the border of Poland and Belarus while the Polish Government sent 15,000 military personnel to the border to prevent any unsanctioned entry into Poland.<sup>18</sup> Their living conditions were terrible, being exposed to low temperatures, with insufficient access to food, water, shelter and medical care.

The immigrants arrived in Belarus were given instructions on how to pass the borders and arrive at the EU. Migrants informed journalists that Belarus provided them with wire cutters and axes to cut through border fences and enter the EU. Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia have described the crisis as hybrid warfare, calling the crisis an incident of human trafficking of migrants, waged by Belarus against the EU.

Human rights organisations voiced concerns over the use of the asylum seekers and the infringement on their rights by Lithuanian and Polish border guards, which was a subject of a European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) order. Also, Human Rights Watch accused Belarusian authorities of manufacturing the crisis blaming Belarusian border guards for violence, inhuman and degrading treatment and coercion, and blaming

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<sup>15</sup> By MAEVE SHEEHY. "U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Belarus in Response to Forced Landing of Ryanair Flight." *Politico*, 21 June 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/06/21/us-sanctions-belarus-ryanair-flight-495323>.

<sup>16</sup> Belarus Plane: What We Know and What We Don't." *BBC*, 25 June 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57239521>.

<sup>17</sup> Jakob Wöllenstein, Elisabeth Bauer, Fausta Šimaitytė. "Illegal Migration as a Political Weapon." *Country Reports*, 5 Aug. 2021, <https://www.kas.de/en/country-reports/detail/-/content/illegale-migration-als-politische-waffe>.

<sup>18</sup> "8 Things to Know about the EU/Belarus Border Crisis." *Medecins sans Frontieres*, 31 Dec. 2021, <https://www.msf.org/8-things-know-about-eubelarus-border-crisis>.

Polish border guards for pushing the migrants back to Belarus.<sup>19</sup> The EU observed all these changes, condemned the use of migrants as weapons<sup>20</sup>, and threatened to impose further sanctions on Belarus that finally imposed.

### **Current situation in Belarus and human rights violation**

Right now, Belarus is characterized as the last dictatorship of Europe. By December 2020, 30,000 people had been detained, and more than 4,000 claimed to have been tortured, according to Nash Dom, a Belarusian NGO<sup>21</sup>. In addition, more and more journalists that express their concerns about the authoritarian regime are being detained by the government, leading to the political repression and the violation of the freedom of speech.

After the sanctions imposed on Belarus due to the border crisis, Lukashenko responded by threatening to cut off natural gas shipments from Russia that transit through Belarus, which was looked at as a severe blow to Europe because winter had started to settle in. Citizens every day experience an illiberal democracy which is highly supported by President Putin. During 2021, Lukashenko and Putin announced a broad range of agreements to solidify the union state, including a joint military doctrine. Although the agreements substantially increase Russia's influence in Belarus, Lukashenko also gains assurance of support and Belarusian citizens fall deeper into uncertainty. The exercises, known as Allied Resolve 2022, are taking place close to the Belarusian border with Ukraine, which is a little over 1,000km long while the US says some 30,000 Russian troops are expected to take part in the drills with Belarus.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED**

### **Lithuania**

The Lithuanian parliament decided on Tuesday, 9 November 2021 to declare a state of emergency at its border region with Belarus. The government of Lithuania proceeded with this action after hundreds of migrants tried entering Poland from

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<sup>19</sup>“Belarus/Poland: Abuse, Pushbacks At Border.” *Human Rights Watch*, 14 Nov. 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/24/belarus/poland-abuse-pushbacks-border>.

<sup>20</sup> “Belarus: Declaration by the High Representative on Behalf of the European Union on the Instrumentalisation of Migrants and Refugees by the Regime.” *European Council*, 30 July 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/07/30/belarus-declaration-of-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-the-instrumentalisation-of-migrants-and-refugees-by-the-regime/>

<sup>21</sup> “‘Sometimes, You Need Unrealistic Goals’: Interview with Olga Karatch, Activist from Belarus.” *Medica Mondiale*, 4 Mar. 2021, [www.medicamondiale.org/en/nc/latest/interview-with-olga-karatch-human-rights-activist-from-belarus.html](http://www.medicamondiale.org/en/nc/latest/interview-with-olga-karatch-human-rights-activist-from-belarus.html).



Belarus, leading to clashes with Polish security forces. Lithuania supported that the migrant influx constituted an organized attempt of Lukashenko to instrumentalize people as a way to destabilize the European Union.

### **Poland**

Poland is highly engaged in the political situation of Belarus as they are neighboring countries, and it has repeatedly raised concerns over the rising of the authoritarian power of Lukashenko. During the border crisis, where Belarus used migrants as human weapons, Poland was profoundly affected as it is the first country of the European Union next to the borders of Belarus and it constitutes the sole route for all those people seeking to enter the EU. Poland declared itself in a state of emergency<sup>22</sup> and asked the aid of the EU in order to prevent the mass influx of illegal immigrants. Currently, Polish contractors have begun work on a new 353-million-euro wall along the Belarus border aimed at deterring refugee crossings following a crisis in the area last year.<sup>23</sup> The 5.5-metre-high wall will run along 186km (115 miles) of the border, almost half its total length and it is to be completed in June<sup>24</sup>. This action illustrates the need of Poland to secure its policy but at the same time it raises concerns over how refugees could seek asylum and also triggers some environmental questions.

### **Russia**

Russia is Belarus' largest and most important economic and political partner. Belarus and Russia were both member states of the Soviet Union, and Russia has since then considered Belarus to be a Russian territory. Even though Lukashenko has repeatedly violated human rights, he has been accused of a presidential election fraud, a forced landing of a Ryanair plane and a lot of other offences, Vladimir Putin always supports him financially and politically. Russia is accused by the other countries to have turned a blind eye over the crimes of Lukashenko in order to achieve their national interests.

### **United States of America (USA)**

Following the fraudulent August 9<sup>th</sup> presidential election, in which significant election irregularities were reported, Lukashenko declared immediate victory and detained more than 600 political opponents. For this reason, USA has imposed additional

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<sup>22</sup>“Poland Declares State of Emergency on Belarus Border amid Migrant Surge.” *Reuters*, 2 Sept. 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-president-imposes-state-emergency-belarus-border-2021-09-02/>.

<sup>23</sup> “Poland Begins Work on \$400m Belarus Border Wall against Refugees.” *ALJAZEERA*, 25 Jan. 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/25/poland-begins-work-on-400m-belarus-border-wall-against-migrants>.

<sup>24</sup>“Poland Begins Work on \$400m Belarus Border Wall against Refugees.” *ALJAZEERA*, 25 Jan. 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/25/poland-begins-work-on-400m-belarus-border-wall-against-migrants>.

sanctions and visa restrictions<sup>25</sup> on various actors implicated in the disputed election and related crackdown on civil society. During his scheduled visit to Central Europe on August 14, 2020, the Secretary of State for the United States, Mike Pompeo, appeared to support the EU line on sanctions and after some time they were imposed by the USA as well.<sup>26</sup> In general, USA is against the repression and the human rights abuses of the Belarusian government, and it shows visibly its discontentment.

### **European Union**

European Union is the organisation most associated with the political crisis of Belarus. As the elections in Belarus were neither free nor fair, and did not meet international standards. The EU does not recognize the results presented by the Belarus authorities. Leaders condemned the violence against peaceful protesters. EU has imposed sanctions, asset freezes, restrictive measures and travel bans trying to change the political situation of Belarus which deteriorates over time.

### **Frontex**

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, is deploying European border guard teams to Lithuania and Latvia to support border controls with Belarus.<sup>27</sup> These states requested the help of the organisation in June due to a significant rise in the number of illegal border crossings from Belarus. Frontex supported Lithuania and Latvia in border surveillance and border management functions contributing to the reduction of the illegal influx.

### **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**

In 1992, Belarus joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, establishing relations of practical cooperation in areas of common interest and developing fruitful dialogue. In 2021, Allies suspended practical cooperation between NATO and Belarus, while maintaining dialogue, as necessary. Allies have highlighted the urgency of Belarus to abide by international law and to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Also, in November 2021, NATO condemned the continued instrumentalization of

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<sup>25</sup> "Imposing Sanctions and Visa Restrictions on Additional Individuals and Entities Undermining Belarusian Democracy." *U.S Embassy in Belarus*, 23 Dec. 2020, <https://by.usembassy.gov/imposing-sanctions-and-visa-restrictions-on-additional-individuals-and-entities-undermining-belarusian-democracy/>.

<sup>26</sup> "US Considering Sanctions Against Belarus After 'Unjustified Violence and Repression' Pompeo Says." *VOA*, 9 Sept. 2020, [https://www.voanews.com/a/europe\\_us-considering-sanctions-against-belarus-after-unjustified-violence-and-repression-pompeo/6195650.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/europe_us-considering-sanctions-against-belarus-after-unjustified-violence-and-repression-pompeo/6195650.html)

<sup>27</sup> "Frontex Provides Support for Lithuania, Latvia at Their Borders with Belarus." *FRONTEX*, 1 July 2021, <https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-provides-support-for-lithuania-latvia-at-their-borders-with-belarus-hqTC5M>.

illegal immigrants over the Belarusian borders blaming Belarus for violating human rights for political purposes.

### United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNHCR was alarmed by the unstable situation that took place over the Belarussian-Polish border, and called on States to ensure that the safety and human rights of migrants and refugees were upheld. UNHCR condemned the instrumentalization of immigrants, and characterized it as deplorable, while it urged Belarus and Poland as well to preserve the well-being of those people. This organisation provided humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees at both sides of the border, offering them food, clothing and water.

### TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
1994	First-term of Lukashenko in office
2020	Presidential elections between Lukashenko and Svetlana
9 August 2020	Day of the voting procedure
9 August- 27 December 2020	Mass protests in Belarus
19 August 2020	Video Conference held by the European Union
18 September 2020	Resolution 45/1 signed by HRC
6 November 2020	Implementation of restrictive measures by the European Council
23 May 2021	Forced landing of a Ryanair flight
Tuesday, 14 December 2021	Siarhei Tsikhanouski was sentenced to 18 years of imprisonment
December 2021	Border crisis between Belarus and Poland
2 December 2021	The European Council adopted the fifth package of sanctions against Belarus
25 February 2022	The U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on the Belarusian regime's defense sector and financial institutions for facilitating Russia's attack in Ukraine

## RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

### **Resolution 45/1, Human Rights Council**

Resolution 45/1 entitled “situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and its aftermath” was adopted on 18 September 2020. This resolution expressed serious concerns of credible allegations of human rights violations as well as allegations of numerous acts of torture and cruel treatment.

### **REGULATION (EU) 2020/1648**

On 6 November 2020 the European Council implemented Article 8a (1) of Regulation (EC) No 765/2006 concerning restrictive measures in respect of Belarus. In this regulation, 40 individuals identified as responsible for repression and intimidation of peaceful demonstrators, opposition members and journalists were sanctioned and they were subject to restrictive measures.

### **European Council conclusions on Belarus, 24 May 2021**

On 24 May 2021, the European Council strongly condemned the forced landing of a Ryanair flight in Minsk, Belarus, endangering aviation safety, as well as the detention by Belarusian authorities of journalist Raman Pratasevich and Sofia Sapega. The European Council demanded the immediate release of the journalist and his wife and they adopted economic sanctions for this violation.

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

### **Video conference of the members of the European Council**

On 19 August 2020 the members of the European Council held a video conference on 19 August. They discussed the situation which unfolded in the aftermath of the presidential elections in Belarus on 9 August. As the election were neither free nor fair, the EU in this virtual conference decided that they do not recognize the results while leaders condemned the violence against peaceful protests.

### **Sanctions**

Belarus has raised a lot of concerns in all member states leading to many responses by multiple countries and organisations. Firstly, a sanction imposed was the travel ban. With this measure, it was entertained the closure of EU’s airspace for Belarusian aircrafts and ban on access to EU airports. Also, a lot of countries cooperated with Latvia and stood in solidarity with this country following the unjustified expulsion of Latvian diplomats.

### **Restrictive measures on key actors involved**

Moreover, restrictive measures are imposed on a total of 183 individuals and 26 entities that have helped incite and organize illegal border crossings through Belarus to the EU, and in this way participated in the instrumentalization of migration for political purposes. Those designated are subject to an asset freeze and EU citizens and companies are forbidden from making funds available to them. Natural persons are additionally subject to a travel ban, which prevents them from entering or transiting through EU territories.

### **Humanitarian assistance**

Furthermore, In November 2021, the EU allocated €700 000 in humanitarian assistance to support vulnerable people stranded at the Belarus border. This consisted of €200 000 for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and a further €500 000 in humanitarian funding. Also, the UK has imposed fresh sanctions on December 2, 2022 on eight Belarusian individuals as well as an asset freeze on OJSC Belaruskali – a major Belarusian producer and exporter of potassium chloride (potash) fertiliser (Belaruskali had already been designated by the US in August 2021).

Lastly, on December 2, 2021, the Government of Canada has broadened the list of listed persons under the *Special Economic Measures (Belarus) Regulations* (the “Regulations”) to include an additional 24 individuals and seven entities. These additional designations were made in coordination with the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

### **Promotion of cooperation in civilian projects and economic support**

The EU could place a focus on projects that enhance labour mobility and develop regional digital, energy, and transport networks that could be of benefit to Belarusian companies. Also, it would be really beneficial to proceed with various investments in the country to shorten global supply chains.

### **Introduced targeted political and economic sanctions**

So far only visa restrictions or account freezes have been imposed, but we should increase financial pressure on the regime. Companies which are the most important to Lukashenko’s business interests should be identified and targeted with sanctions, all their trading activity halted, and all their accounts abroad frozen.

### **Support NGOs to investigate allegations of torture**

NGOs need to take action and document torture and falsification, gathered as evidence while preparing the ground for investigations, targeted sanctions, and leverage on law enforcement officials in the future.

### **Ensure fundamental freedoms and human rights**

After the constant violations of human rights, member states need to ensure the rule of law and a functioning independent judiciary in Belarus, and the ceasing of all repression, persecution, ill-treatment, sexual and gender-based violence. This can be attained by increasing the direct support to the Belarusian opposition, civil society, human rights defenders and independent media organisations inside and outside of Belarus.

### **Constitutional Reform**

Constitutional reform could be really helpful in order to pave the way for a democratic Belarus. At this constitution there should be considered various aspects such as release of all political prisoners, end of all forms of violence against peaceful protests, parallel reform of the electoral code to ensure a transparent election process as well as free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections in accordance with OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) criteria.

### **Increase Road Safety**

Belarus serves as an important transit corridor for the Europe and Central Asia region. For this reason, the World Bank as well as other organisations should continue implementing innovative solution for upgrading Belarus' road safety. The Belarusian Road Engineering and Technical Centre should collaborate with World Bank's Road Upgrading and Modernization Project in order Belarus to develop as a country and become more independent.

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