



Belarus
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Bimonthly Review **(February - March)**

by the

**Institute of International Relations and Political Science
Vilnius University
(IIRPS VU)**



2025

I. Lukashenka's inauguration and the Belarusian government

Lukashenka's seventh consecutive term

Lukashenka chose to hold his seventh inauguration on 25 March, coinciding with Freedom Day, which is traditionally linked to his opposition, likely aiming to downgrade and symbolically expropriate this date. In his speech, he dismissed critics branding him "Europe's last dictator", asserting that Belarus has more democracy than countries that are often seen as democratic models. He claimed, "Half of the world is dreaming about our 'dictatorship', the dictatorship of real business and the interests of our people". During the ceremony, with a carefully selected audience, he labelled his opponents as foreign puppets lacking public support and prospects. The inauguration's atmosphere underscored his defiance towards criticism while reinforcing his grip on power.ⁱ

Meanwhile, authorities employed Soviet-style authoritarian mobilisation, forcing public-sector workers, students, and even kindergarten children to publicly demonstrate their loyalty to Lukashenka in bizarre, large-scale public acts.ⁱⁱ In turn, on the eve of the inauguration, a coalition of 10 Belarusian human rights organisations issued a statement in which they claimed the authoritarian leader's rule is "unconstitutional".ⁱⁱⁱ

The government reshuffle

On 3 February 2025, the government of Belarus resigned following the presidential election. For the first time, Lukashenka did not simply (re)appoint the new government but imitated a process of power sharing by forming a special commission, led by the head of the Presidential Administration Dzmitry Kruty, to propose new cabinet candidates. This shift suggested a decrease in power for Natallia Kachanava and Prime Minister Raman Halouchanka, who was dismissed on 10 March, elevating Kruty's status. Lukashenka voiced frustration with Halouchanka's outgoing government during a meeting with Prosecutor General Andrej Shved.^{iv}

New Prime Minister

Aliaksandar Lukashenka has appointed Aliaksandar Turchyn as the new Prime Minister, replacing Raman Halouchanka, who had held the position since June 2020. Until early 2025, his activities in this position corresponded to Lukashenka's expectations and priorities.

Turchyn, 49 years old, previously held the position of Minsk Regional Executive Committee Chairman. He has a background in economics, having graduated from the Belarusian State Economic University and the Academy of Public Administration under the President of Belarus. He has held various roles since 2010, including serving as Lukashenka's aide and representative in the Homiel region. Turchyn was previously the First Deputy Prime Minister and became head of the Minsk region in November 2019. Notably, he is included in Western sanctions lists.^v

The appointment of the new Prime Minister has sparked a range of media and expert discussions, particularly regarding whether he could be viewed as a potential candidate for the presidency after Lukashenka steps down. However, as the latter has no such intentions, all speculation about possible successors is somewhat impractical.^{vi}

A new head of the National Bank with no financial management experience

On 10 March 2025, as part of a government reshuffle, Lukashenka appointed former Prime Minister Raman Halouchanka as Chairman of the Board of the National Bank of Belarus.^{vii}

He replaces Paval Kallaour, who led the institution for 10 years. It remains unclear whether Kallaour will take on a new public administration role.

Kallaour, with a degree in economy and extensive banking experience, managed to curb high inflation, stabilise the Belarusian rouble, promote de-dollarisation, and boost public confidence in the financial system. In contrast, Halouchanka has no financial management experience but has a strong security background, having worked in the Prosecutor's Office, Security Council, Presidential Administration, and as head of the State Military-Industrial Committee. He also served as Ambassador to the UAE. According to Lukashenka, Halouchanka "himself asked for the position". Independent experts fear his leadership could lead to increased lending and higher inflation, though no major changes have been observed at the National Bank so far.^{viii}

On 27 March 2025, Lukashenka also appointed Aliaksandar Yahorau,^{ix} former deputy head of the Presidential Administration, as First Deputy Chairman of the Board. He stated that the National Bank would not resort to money printing to finance the economy, likening it to "suicide".

II. The human rights situation and political prisoners in Belarus

The human rights situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate. As of 27 March 2025, at least 1,199 individuals remain behind bars on politically motivated charges, despite some limited releases through presidential pardons.^x On 20 March 2025, six Belarusian and international civil society organisations submitted evidence of potential crimes against humanity committed by the Belarusian authorities to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC).^{xi}

Detention conditions and mistreatment in the Belarusian penal system

Female political prisoners face particularly harsh conditions in Belarusian detention facilities. According to the human rights centre Viasna, women experience additional pressure, including restrictions on correspondence and parcels, the deprivation of basic rights, and being labelled as "prone to extremism". They endure gender-based violence, threats of rape, and complete isolation for months at a time. Other problems include overcrowded cells, a lack of access to warm water and hygiene products, forced low-paid work in harsh conditions, and searches conducted by male staff.^{xii}

Political prisoners continue to face systematic ill-treatment and torture. Prison authorities routinely deny political prisoners timely and appropriate healthcare. Several high-profile prisoners, including Viktar Babaryka, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, and Mikalai Statkevich, have been held incommunicado for extended periods. In January 2025, Lithuanian MEP Petras Auštrevičius nominated Statkevich, who was arrested in May 2020 and sentenced to 14 years in prison, for the Nobel Peace Prize.^{xiii}

Releases and new prosecutions

In February 2025, the Belarusian government released three political prisoners, including American citizen and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist Andrey Kuznechyk. Kuznechyk had been imprisoned for over three years, initially on hooliganism charges and later for creating an extremist group. His release, along with two others, followed diplomatic efforts by the US government, with American officials reportedly engaging in negotiations

to secure their freedom.^{xiv} In parallel, the release is viewed as a bid by Minsk to repair ties with Washington.

The US government welcomed the release, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio crediting President Trump's leadership and expressing gratitude to Lithuania for its assistance. In the official statement, he also reaffirmed Washington's commitment to securing the release of other detained Americans and the nearly 1,300 political prisoners still imprisoned in Belarus.^{xv} However, these limited releases are overshadowed by continued repression in the country. Additionally, over a dozen designated political prisoners have appeared on the government's "extremist" list. The authorities continue to target those providing support to political prisoners.

III. The Belarusian democratic forces and diaspora

The international activities of the Belarusian democratic forces

The Belarusian democratic forces continue to work on international recognition and diplomatic initiatives. On 10 February 2025, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya met with Antonio Costa, the President of the European Council, in Brussels. They discussed coordinating efforts to increase international pressure on the Lukashenka regime, particularly regarding the release of political prisoners and the EU's non-recognition of the recent presidential elections.^{xvi} The same month, Tsikhanouskaya met with the interparliamentary alliance "For a Democratic Belarus", furthering diplomatic efforts to maintain international support for democratic change in Belarus. In March 2025, she addressed the European Parliament and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe; she also met with key European politicians, including European Parliament President Roberta Metsola.^{xvii} On 21 March 2025, Tsikhanouskaya met with UK Minister of State for Europe Stephen Doughty to launch strategic consultations between the United Kingdom and Belarus's democratic forces.^{xviii}

The Council of Europe has maintained its Contact Group on Cooperation with Belarusian Democratic Forces and Civil Society. In March 2025, representatives of the democratic forces for the first time in history took part in a session of a Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.^{xix}

The "New Belarusian Passport Initiative" is moving out of Lithuania

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya announced that the "New Belarus Passport Initiative" will be relocated to one of the countries where the issue of obtaining legal documents for Belarusians remains unresolved. Meanwhile, in Lithuania, Belarusians can receive a document that replaces their national travel document – an alien's passport.

This decision follows legal and symbolic challenges in Lithuania, where authorities declared the new Belarusian passports invalid, which led to the suspension of their production and distribution.^{xx}

Freedom Day celebrations

On 25 March 2025, Belarusians commemorated Freedom Day (the 107th anniversary of the Belarusian Democratic Republic's declaration of independence in 1918), which is traditionally celebrated as the most important national holiday by democratically minded Belarusians. While any celebrations inside the country are impossible because of repression, the Belarusian diaspora worldwide celebrated with various events emphasising solidarity, national identity, and support for political prisoners. In Poland, several marches took place in different cities. A concert in Warsaw devoted to the day was attended by Polish

Deputy Foreign Minister Anna Radwan Röhrenschef and Belarusian democratic leaders.^{xxi} In Vilnius, several hundred Belarusians gathered together with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in Lukiškės Square, with the event featuring speeches and culminating in a march to light candles near the Belarusian Embassy.^{xxii}

It should be noted that before Freedom Day, the Belarusian Investigative Committee threatened Belarusians abroad who were planning to take part in the celebration with allegedly upcoming repressive consequences (searches, property seizure, and threatening criminal prosecution in absentia).^{xxiii} They made the same threat last year. On 28 March 2025, Belarusian propagandists reported that law enforcement officers had identified protesters in various cities in Lithuania, Poland, Germany, the US, and Canada.^{xxiv}

Developments related to the Belarusian diaspora in different countries

The Belarusian diaspora continues to face significant challenges across various countries. In Poland, 134,900 Belarusians were officially employed and covered by pension insurance at the end of 2024 – an increase of 5,500 from the previous year. However, this is the slowest annual growth in eight years,^{xxv} due to a decline in political emigration and stricter visa policies. Despite this, Belarusians remain the second-largest foreign workforce in Poland after Ukrainians.

In Lithuania, the Belarusian diaspora is undergoing notable changes, particularly in the IT sector, which lost over 400 Belarusian specialists in 2024.^{xxvi} The total number of Belarusians with residence permits fell by 7.5% (over 4,600 people), reaching 57,511 at the start of 2025. Stricter migration policies and security concerns contributed to this decline, with 598 Belarusians labelled as security threats in 2024, leading to 179 residence permit rejections, 232 nonrenewals, and 175 revocations.^{xxvii}

Meanwhile, in Georgia, the Tbilisi City Court overturned the Migration Department's rejection of asylum for Belarusian human rights defender Raman Kislyak,^{xxviii} allowing his appeal to be reviewed. Between 2019 and 2024, Georgia did not grant asylum to a single Belarusian, rejecting 54 out of 81 applications.

Belarusian propaganda attacks

In parallel, Belarusian propaganda continues to target exiled Belarusians. On 19 March 2025, Belteleradiocompany released the propaganda film *Alien Sky*, featuring exiled Belarusians discussing migration challenges in Poland and the Baltic states. However, the participants were misled, believing the film was being produced at the request of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's office to highlight the problems faced by Belarusians in exile for Western donors. Once they discovered its true purpose, all but one female participant – who appeared to be in Belarus – expressed strong disapproval and regret.^{xxix}

A tragic development linked to this propaganda effort was the death of the husband of the Belarus-based female participant. According to reports, he committed suicide^{xxx} while awaiting a decision on his asylum request at the Lithuanian Refugee Registration Centre in Pabradė. This led to social media discussions about a possible connection between his death and the film.^{xxxi}

IV. Russia–Belarus integration developments

Another concession to the Kremlin

On 26 February 2025, the Belarusian Parliament approved a security treaty with Russia under the Russia-Belarus Union State framework.^{xxxii} The Russian Parliament ratified it on the same day. The treaty allows the deployment of Russian military facilities on Belarusian territory.

Belarusian officials, including State Secretary of the Security Council Aliaksandar Val'fovich, hailed the agreement as a step towards stronger security cooperation.^{xxxiii} However, independent experts highlight that it was signed alongside a deal in which Russia agreed to defer Belarus's debts. This suggests it may be part of a broader political trade-off, with Lukashenka conceding more of Belarus's sovereignty in exchange for Kremlin support.^{xxxiv}

V. Military and security threats

Belarus's peace-building propagandistic rhetoric vs its neighbours security concerns

In February 2025, Belarusian military and security officials intensified efforts to portray the country as a “peaceful state with no intention of attacking its neighbours”. This followed statements by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who warned that Russia was trying to provoke NATO and drag Belarus into the war.^{xxxv} On 23 February, Val'fovich reiterated the “peaceful neighbour” message on state-run Belarusian TV.^{xxxvi} The next day, an aide to the Minister of Defence of Belarus for International Military Cooperation, Valer Ravenka, expanded on this, proposing renewed military cooperation with Poland - on the condition of mutual military inspections over an 80 kilometre zone on both sides of the border.^{xxxvii} Despite this rhetoric, Belarusian authorities have been conducting army combat readiness checks since February, raising concerns among neighbouring states.

If the “peaceful neighbour and borders” Belarusian propagandist narrative has had any effect, it has been opposite to their expectations. In March 2025, the defence ministers of Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania recommended that their countries withdraw from the international agreement banning anti-personnel mines, also known as the Ottawa Treaty.^{xxxviii} Finland could be the next to withdraw from the treaty, having previously explained that it might happen due to Russia's use of anti-personnel mines in Ukraine. The four countries made these intentions clear in their joint statement.^{xxxix} In parallel, voices were raised in favour of producing landmines in these countries. There are also reports that Poland and Lithuania have already been considering the possibility of placing land mines along the borders with Belarus.^{xl} However, the critics of the decision, including the Canadians who developed and promoted the original Ottawa agreement, warned that this is more likely to harm the four countries' civilians and economies than be a successful weapon in warfare.^{xli}

VI. Energy security and nuclear threats

Much ado about BRELL and Lukashenka's request for the new NPP

On 8 February 2025, all three Baltic states exited the BRELL energy network, which had interconnected them with Russia and Belarus for capacity sharing and energy transfer. In reaction, the Belarusian government argued that this disconnection would lead to increased electricity costs and instability in the Baltic-Nordic grid. However, Belarus also secured alternative energy sources in parallel by connecting to the Russian North-Western energy system.^{xlii} This move has not only heightened Belarus's reliance on Russia but also facilitated

the synchronisation of energy systems under the Russia-Belarus Union State agreements, altering the regional energy dynamics.

The Baltic states' recent exit from the BRELL network has significantly hindered the Belarusian government's ambitions to export electricity generated by the Astravets Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). Given the current geopolitical situation, such exports now appear unfeasible. Despite this setback, during a visit to Moscow on 13 March, Aliaksandar Lukashenka reiterated his request (first formulated in January 2025) to Rosatom to construct a second NPP in Belarus, probably in the Mahileu region, near the Russian border.^{xliii}

The existing Astravets NPP has been operating under frequent shutdowns, with its second reactor only reconnected to the grid in January 2025. This limited operational capacity has not yielded substantial economic or social benefits, and electricity and heating prices have risen in Belarus over the past year. The proposed new NPP is intended to enhance energy security in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, thereby serving Moscow as a strategic geopolitical asset in the region.^{xliv}

Nuclear threats from the Chernobyl NPP

Nuclear power plants with Soviet reactors surround Belarus. While the Ignalina NPP in the northwest and the Chernobyl NPP in the south are in the process of being fully decommissioned, the Smolensk NPP, located on the border with Russia, remains operational. Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 highlighted the possibility of civilian nuclear facilities being used for military purposes. The Chernobyl NPP, in particular, poses a security risk, as evidenced by recent damage to the 4th reactor's protective shield caused by Russian drone activity on 14 February 2025.^{xlv}

Belarusian authorities usually attempt to downplay the scale and refrain from commenting on incidents with military drones on the territory of the country. However, the recent fire observed on the roof of the Chernobyl NPP after being struck by a drone was visible from Belarus. The Belarusian state meteorological service had no choice but to address the issue of the radiological situation in the region adjacent to Ukraine, ultimately reporting that radiation levels remained consistent with normal conditions.^{xvi}

VII. Developments in the economy and financial sector in Belarus

Price regulation in Belarus

The Ministry of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade of Belarus has prepared amendments^{xlvii} to the infamous Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus No. 713 "On the price regulation system", which imposes significant restrictions on price increases by both the sellers and manufacturers of products. The ministry specified that they want to significantly reduce the list of goods whose prices are regulated by the state. In addition, it is planned to "grant manufacturers the right to set selling prices based on the level of profitability that the enterprise has developed in recent years" and to require that the trade markup for Belarusian goods, as a rule, is not lower than imports. It is assumed that such innovations, on the one hand, will reduce the pressure on trade enterprises and, on the other, will not significantly impact retail prices. Earlier, Prime Minister Aliaksandar Turchyn also proposed reducing the list of goods whose cost is controlled by the state.^{xlviii}

Resolution No. 713 was adopted during the wave of high inflation in 2022 and effectively prohibited sellers and manufacturers from raising prices. This led to a slowdown in inflation

but significantly reduced trade profitability. According to the Ministry of Economy, in 2024, 43% of all companies that faced bankruptcy were trade organisations.^{xlix}

Some macroeconomic indicators

In February 2025, annual inflation in Belarus^l accelerated to 5.6%. A month earlier, the figure was 5.2%. Food products are rising in price the fastest – in annual terms, their price rose by 6.7%. Services have increased in price by 6.5% over the year, and non-food products by 3.4%. By comparison, in Russia, annual inflation^{li} at the end of February 2025 was 10.1%, slowing down compared to the 10.6% rate in January.

Belarus's GDP for January–February 2025 grew by 3.1%^{lii} compared to January–February 2024. The main growth drivers were the economic sectors focused on domestic consumption and construction.^{liii} A month earlier, the GDP growth rate was 3.7%; thus, economic growth slowed down.

Russia allowed the postponement of Belarusian debt

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law^{liv} on postponing payments under intergovernmental agreements with Belarus. This concerns the rescheduling of payments on the principal debt from 1 April 2024 to 31 December 2024 and interest payments from 1 July to 31 December 2024 for the years 2031–2036. The total amount of payments subject to deferment is 800 million USD. It is reported that the deferment was provided to reduce the burden on the Belarusian budget. Russia is Belarus's largest external creditor. From a broader perspective, payments on external public debt in 2025 were previously estimated by the Belarusian Ministry of Finance^{lv} at 7.1 billion BYN (2 billion EUR) to repay the principal debt and 3.6 billion BYN (1 billion EUR) to repay interest on the loans.

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