



Belarus  
Research  
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Policy

# ***Bimonthly Review***

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**by**

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## I. Security developments

### Cross-border drone incursions into Lithuania

In July 2025, Lithuania reported two drone incursions originating from Belarusian territory, raising renewed concerns over regional airspace security and hybrid threats. On 10 July, a Russian-made drone entered Lithuanian airspace and crashed near a closed border checkpoint. Initially suspected to be a Shahed-type strike drone, it was later identified as a Gerbera decoy, an unarmed model typically used for training purposes or to test adversary air defences.<sup>i</sup> The incident prompted an immediate diplomatic response. Lithuania issued a formal protest note to Belarus, describing the breach as a serious violation of national sovereignty and demanding a full explanation from Minsk. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania emphasised that such actions pose a direct threat to the security of both Lithuania and the broader region.<sup>ii</sup>

The second incident occurred on 28 July, when another unidentified drone crossed into Lithuanian airspace near Vilnius. The aircraft flew at a low altitude, triggering public alerts, the mobilisation of emergency services, and a coordinated search operation. Although the drone was not located, officials noted strong similarities with the earlier incident and suspected it may also have originated from Belarusian territory.<sup>iii</sup> The overflight was interpreted by analysts as a deliberate act designed to test Lithuania's air defence readiness and provoke uncertainty. It also intensified public debate about the vulnerability of national airspace in the face of increasingly common unmanned aerial intrusions.

The situation with the drone sparked public debate in Lithuania about why it was not shot down, as happened in a similar case in Belarus (see below). In response, Defence Minister Dovilė Šakalienė clarified that, unlike in Belarus, Lithuanian air defence forces are authorised to use lethal force against aerial intrusions in peacetime only under specific circumstances. A shootdown would be ordered only if there were an immediate threat to critical infrastructure or public safety, and such an action would require explicit authorisation from the Defence Minister or NATO Air Command.<sup>iv</sup>

### Drone crash in Minsk: Technical error or political provocation?

On 29 July, a drone crashed into a residential courtyard on Matusevich Street in Minsk, damaging property and causing significant alarm. The Belarusian Ministry of Defence claimed that its air defences intercepted the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) using electronic warfare tools. The crash occurred near a kindergarten and residential buildings, but no casualties were reported. The Investigative Committee of Belarus stated that the drone carried a TNT-based explosive device with shrapnel, and the committee released images showing debris with Ukrainian-language labels and components reportedly made in Germany.<sup>v</sup>

However, analysts and eyewitnesses have questioned the official narrative. Some experts pointed out that a true combat drone would likely have detonated on impact.

Others proposed alternative explanations, including the possibility of a Russian drone misfiring en route to Ukraine, or even a staged provocation by Belarusian or Russian intelligence. The drone's flight path, the slow state response, and the coinciding phone call between Lukashenka and Putin have all fuelled suspicions of a politically motivated incident intended to justify closer security coordination or to discourage attempts at Belarusian-Western dialogue.<sup>vi</sup>

Following the drone explosion in Minsk, the Belarusian riot police (AMAP) reportedly detained several residents and passers-by near the site. Human rights organisations have noted a heavy security presence, with authorities likely targeting those suspected of sharing footage or information with independent media.<sup>vii</sup> This response reflects the Belarusian regime's broader strategy of controlling the narrative around politically sensitive incidents by suppressing public access to information and deterring citizen reporting. Rather than ensuring public safety or transparency, the authorities are focused on concealing potential security failures and silencing alternative accounts.

Opposition leader-in-exile Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya condemned the regime's lack of transparency and criticised its failure to alert the population or issue public safety guidance. She argued that the government prioritises control over citizen safety and that the incident reflects broader dysfunction in the state's crisis response system.<sup>viii</sup>

## **II. The Belarusian government reshuffle**

In July 2025, Natallia Piatkevich was appointed Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus with responsibility for social issues, including education, healthcare and culture.<sup>ix</sup> A long-standing regime insider, Piatkevich previously held senior roles in the presidential administration but was sidelined from politics in 2014 following a high-profile scandal.<sup>x</sup> Her return to the public sector in 2024 and subsequent promotion are seen by analysts either as a reward for loyalty or as a sign of limited staffing options following the political crisis of 2020.<sup>xi</sup> While some observers view the shift from the presidential administration to the government as a demotion, others suggest it reflects growing concern within the regime over social unrest and the need for improved public engagement.

Along with her appointment, a presidential decree extended the powers of deputy prime ministers, allowing them to issue instructions, supervise implementation, evaluate subordinate institutions, and convene expert discussions independently. Piatkevich was also appointed as Belarus's representative to the Eurasian Economic Commission Council and as the national coordinator on matters related to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Although these roles are mostly symbolic, they support the regime's broader efforts to align with Russian-led regional initiatives.<sup>xii</sup>

Additional personnel changes in the Belarusian government include the removal of Uladzimir Karanik after only two months as Deputy Prime Minister. He was reassigned to Chair of the National Academy of Sciences, a move widely interpreted as a demotion. Former KGB head Valer Vakulchyk was appointed Head of the Government Secretariat, with Lukashenka citing his security background as useful for maintaining discipline and

cooperation across government structures. In the industrial sector, Andrei Kuzniatsou was promoted to Minister of Industry, replacing Aliaksandr Yafimau, who was tasked with resolving ongoing difficulties at the heavily sanctioned Amkador industrial holding company.<sup>xiii</sup>

### **III. The human rights situation**

The human rights situation in Belarus during June and July 2025 remained critically severe. While selective pardons resulted in the release of a small number of high-profile prisoners, systemic repression intensified. This repression includes new arrests, harsh prison conditions and transnational intimidation. As of 25 July 2025, at least 1,164 individuals remain imprisoned on politically motivated charges,<sup>xiv</sup> and new cases of such detentions have been reported across the country in recent months. Some observers suggest that the recent increase in arrests may be linked to the approaching five-year limitation period for prosecuting participants of the 2020 protests.<sup>xv</sup> However, in cases classified as “extremism”, Belarusian legislation permits these time limits to be extended significantly.

Nils Muižnieks, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, presented the annual report of the mandate to the UN Human Rights Council at its 59th session on 26 June. The report, covering the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, as well as his accompanying statement, highlighted the continued absence of progress in the human rights situation. Muižnieks emphasised that the Belarusian authorities persist in disregarding offers of cooperation.<sup>xvi</sup>

#### **Releases and new prosecutions**

Belarusian officials claim they are open to dialogue with the United States, presenting the release of several political prisoners as part of this process.<sup>xvii</sup> On 21 June, just hours after a meeting between United States envoy General Keith Kellogg and Aliaksandr Lukashenka, the Belarusian authorities released 14 prisoners. Among those freed were Siarhei Tsikhanouski, a blogger and the husband of opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, along with several foreign nationals. All individuals were immediately expelled to Lithuania.<sup>xviii</sup>

Despite these high-profile releases, new prosecutions have continued, particularly targeting volunteers associated with the *Belaruski Hajun* monitoring group and other organisations classified by the authorities as extremist formations or terrorist organisations. Cross-border repression also persists. Lithuania’s State Security Department has reported that the Belarusian KGB is actively attempting to recruit members of the Belarusian diaspora in Lithuania, Poland and Georgia.<sup>xix</sup> These efforts reportedly involve threats, blackmail and inducements, all of which are aimed at collecting intelligence on opposition activity and undermining the work of the exiled Democratic Forces. In line with these warnings, on 9 July 2025, the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs officially designated the exiled United Transitional Cabinet as a

terrorist organisation.<sup>xx</sup>

### **Detention conditions and mistreatment**

Political prisoners in Belarus continue to face systematic ill-treatment and torture, including incommunicado detention in the case of several high-profile individuals. Siarhei Tsikhanouski, who spent most of his five years in prison in solitary confinement, often in cells as small as three square metres, has spoken about the conditions of his detention during a special press conference<sup>xxi</sup> and in subsequent interviews.

He described his total isolation from any human contact except for prison guards, who communicated only through insults, threats and intimidation. The conditions, according to Tsikhanouski, amounted to torture. Guards repeatedly warned him that he would never be released and told him that he would die in prison. He was denied medical care, frequently lacked basic hygiene items such as toothpaste and soap, and lost nearly half of his body weight, dropping from 135 kilograms to 79. He was also forced to carry out physical labour, such as scrubbing floors multiple times a day, under threat of further punishment. Other recently released political prisoners have also reported mistreatment while in detention.

### **International solidarity efforts**

International solidarity efforts with pro-democratic Belarusians continue. Several European parliamentarians and politicians have symbolically “adopted” political prisoners in order to raise awareness and exert pressure on the Belarusian authorities. On 8 July, the European Parliament held a debate on the situation in Belarus. During the session, Members of the European Parliament called for a moratorium on the death penalty and strongly condemned the ongoing political trials *in absentia*.<sup>xxii</sup>

However, some backsliding in support for politically persecuted Belarusians is also evident. For example, Germany has suspended all humanitarian admissions procedures, including the issuance of humanitarian visas for politically persecuted persons from Belarus. According to official explanations, this is in line with the coalition agreement, and the governing parties are currently considering how to phase out voluntary federal admissions programmes as far as possible. Until a decision is reached, all procedures have been suspended.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## **IV. The Democratic Forces and the diaspora**

### **International activities of the Democratic Forces**

The Belarusian Democratic Forces continue their efforts to gain international recognition and advance diplomatic initiatives. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya addressed European Union officials in Brussels on 11 June, spoke at the **European Economic and Social Committee** (EESC) plenary on 19 June, and engaged with international media, including *Politico*, on 12 July, where she called for sustained sanctions and a global

campaign to “free them all”.<sup>xxiv</sup> From 24-26 June, she took part in the NATO Public Forum in The Hague, where she discussed European security and Belarus’s role within that context. At a NATO side event, she presented the “Red Paper” report, which outlined the threats posed by the Lukashenka regime and called for closer cooperation between NATO and Belarusian civil society.<sup>xxv</sup> In late June, she and her husband, Siarhei Tsikhanouski, met with then-Polish President Andrzej Duda and Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski.<sup>xxvi</sup>

### Controversies following a public statement of Siarhei Tsikhanouski

Siarhei Tsikhanouski has pledged not to challenge the leadership of his wife, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and instead to focus on advocating for the release of political prisoners. He also announced plans to expand his YouTube media channel and to engage with Belarusian diaspora communities.<sup>xxvii</sup>

However, some of his subsequent public remarks have sparked controversy. In early July 2025, during a YouTube interview, Tsikhanouski suggested that if efforts to remove the Lukashenka regime failed, exiled Belarusians might consider establishing semi-autonomous “islands” or territories abroad. He referenced historical precedents such as German autonomous districts in imperial Russia.

The suggestion was swiftly and firmly rejected by Lithuanian officials. President Gitanas Nausėda called the idea a matter of national security and labelled it unacceptable. Parliamentary committee chairs warned that such proposals could undermine the Belarusian democratic movement and threaten Lithuania’s territorial integrity.

The Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya responded by firmly rejecting the idea of any territorial “islands” in Lithuania. The statement emphasised that Belarusians have never challenged, and will never challenge, Lithuania’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. It reiterated that the movement’s core goal remains the return to a free and democratic Belarus, and it expressed deep gratitude to Lithuania for the country’s continued support and hospitality.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Tsikhanouski later clarified his comments, stating that he had been misunderstood. He explained that he was referring to the creation of Belarusian business and cultural hubs abroad, intended to preserve language and identity, rather than autonomous political structures. He also pledged to learn Lithuanian and reaffirmed his respect for Lithuania’s sovereignty.

### Other developments related to the Democratic Forces and diaspora

The Belarusian Democratic Forces has adopted a **Memorandum on the Abolition of the Death Penalty in Belarus**.<sup>xxix</sup> The document was approved by the Coordination Council on 17 June 2025 and was subsequently endorsed by the United Transitional Cabinet and the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.

The Coordination Council has also voted to recommend the appointment of **Alisa Ryzhychenka** as the United Transitional Cabinet’s Representative for Economy and Finance.<sup>xxx</sup>

In July 2025, a group of experts and representatives of Belarusian civil society led by Iryna Ponedelnik released the *Belarusian Civil Society Report on Sustainable*

*Development Goals Implementation* ahead of the presentation of the Belarusian regime's *Voluntary National Review* at the United Nations. The 83-page alternative report exposes manipulations concealed within official statistics and presents an accurate reflection of the real situation in the country.<sup>xxxix</sup>

## **Controversies with Belarusian solidarity initiatives**

In June and July, several controversial stories related to Belarusian solidarity initiatives were made public. Firstly, the **ByHelp** initiative, established to provide financial support to victims of repression in Belarus, became embroiled in controversy over alleged shortcomings in financial transparency and concerns regarding the distribution of aid.<sup>xxxix</sup> Although ByHelp maintained that all assistance was safely and directly delivered to verified recipients, the organisation nonetheless withdrew from the newly established **International Humanitarian Fund for Victims of Repression**. It reaffirmed its commitment to continue providing direct support within Belarus through its own distribution channels.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Secondly, in July 2025, a scandal emerged involving **Andrei Stryzhak**, head of the **BYSOL solidarity fund**, following a report by *Euroradio* in which several female Belarusian activists and human rights defenders accused him of sending unsolicited explicit images (“dick pics”) via personal messages. Stryzhak publicly acknowledged his actions, issued an apology on social media, and emphasised that he had not intended to exert pressure, abuse power, or cause harm. He also stated his intention to seek professional help for what he described as a personal issue.

In response, the BYSOL fund temporarily suspended Stryzhak from his leadership duties and launched an independent internal investigation involving external experts. The organisation announced that a decision regarding his future role would be made by **September 2025**.<sup>xxxix</sup> Prominent figures and organisations within the Belarusian democratic movement strongly condemned Stryzhak's behaviour, describing it as incompatible with the values of the movement. They reiterated the importance of upholding ethical standards, transparency, and mutual respect within civil society.<sup>xxxv</sup>

## **V. Developments in the economy**

### **Prices and the continuation of the “potato crisis”**

The Belarusian authorities are continuing to respond to the potato shortage that emerged in February 2025, primarily triggered by manual price controls. However, their approach remains rooted in Soviet-era regulatory practices. On 16 July 2025, new measures came into effect obliging retail organisations to ensure the continuous availability of key food staples, including potatoes, cabbage, carrots, beetroot, onions, and apples. Failure to comply may result in fines ranging from 5 to 200 base units (approximately EUR 60 to EUR 2,200).<sup>xxxvi</sup>

At the same time, independent media report that the potato situation remains tense. In June, prices for new potatoes reached BYN 10 per kilogram (EUR 2.6) in some

markets, with particularly high prices in Minsk. In an apparent attempt to stabilise the market, the government - via the state-affiliated Belarusian Republican Union of Consumer Societies (*Belcoopsoyuz*) - began the large-scale procurement of potatoes from the population in July, offering prices ranging from BYN 1.80 to 2.80 per kilogram (EUR 0.5-0.7).<sup>xxxvii</sup> Nevertheless, retail prices have remained elevated. Throughout July, potatoes were being sold in shops at BYN 2.5 to 3.5 per kilogram (EUR 0.7-0.9), which is well above typical seasonal levels. According to Belstat, potato prices increased by 127% between December 2024 and June 2025, underlining the severity of the ongoing supply and pricing imbalance.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Rising prices are not limited to potatoes. Inflation in Belarus continued accelerating for the fifth consecutive month. As of the end of June 2025, annual inflation reached 7.3%, marking the highest level since February 2023. In May, the annual rate stood slightly lower at 7.1%.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Over the previous 12 months, food prices increased by 10.5%, while non-food goods rose by 3.2% and services by 7.1%. Month-on-month, consumer prices in June rose by 0.9%. Within this period, food prices increased by 1.7%, non-food prices by 0.04%, and service costs by 0.5%.

This upward trend stands in contrast to the government's official socio-economic forecast, which set a target for annual inflation not to exceed 5% by the end of 2025.<sup>xl</sup>

## Refinancing rate

Against the backdrop of accelerating inflation, on 25 June 2025 Belarus raised its refinancing rate from 9.5% to 9.75% per annum.<sup>xli</sup> According to the National Bank of Belarus, the decision was prompted by the strengthening of macroeconomic imbalances. The primary driver of these imbalances was a sharp increase in wages, which have begun to outpace growth in labour productivity. This mismatch has contributed to a rise in imports of consumer goods and heightened demand for credit, further fuelling import growth. The National Bank reported that imports of consumer goods increased by 14.5% between January and April 2025. In parallel, the banking sector has accumulated a surplus of liquidity, and the overall money supply has expanded by more than 15% over the past year.

Taking these factors into consideration, the National Bank implemented the rate hike with the stated aim of encouraging savings among households and businesses while also dampening excessive demand for credit.<sup>xlii</sup>

## Ban on cryptocurrencies

The **National Bank of Belarus** has announced plans to introduce a complete ban on the use of cryptocurrencies as a means of payment within the country. The announcement was made by Prime Minister **Raman Halouchanka**, who also heads the country's financial regulator, during a meeting with **Timur Suleimenov**, Chairman of the National Bank of Kazakhstan.<sup>xliii</sup> According to Halouchanka, the digital assets market is evolving rapidly and already poses risks to financial stability, necessitating legislative revisions.<sup>xliv</sup> In addition to the proposed ban, the National Bank intends to tighten



regulatory requirements for cryptocurrency businesses and to implement more robust consumer protection mechanisms.

This marks a significant shift in policy. Belarus had previously positioned itself as a regional leader in cryptocurrency legalisation, having introduced a legal framework in 2018. Under the current rules, individuals are permitted to own, exchange, mine, and donate cryptocurrencies, while legal entities may use them for international settlements. However, the planned regulatory changes are expected to considerably restrict these activities.

Meanwhile, the National Bank confirmed that it is moving ahead with plans to launch a **national digital rouble** in mid-2026 as part of its broader strategy to digitise monetary circulation in the country.<sup>xlv</sup>

## GDP

Belarus's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 2.1% in the first half of 2025, reaching **BYN 129.4 billion** (approximately **EUR 36 billion**) at current prices.<sup>xlvi</sup> However, the pace of economic growth has been gradually slowing for several consecutive months. In annual terms, GDP growth stood at 2.5% for January-May, 2.8% for January-April, and 3.1% for the first quarter.

According to the Belarusian **Ministry of Economy**, the deceleration in growth is largely attributed to a decline in output across several industrial sectors, set against the backdrop of a broader global economic slowdown.<sup>xlvii</sup> In addition, **unfavourable weather conditions** have negatively affected the agricultural sector, particularly by delaying grain harvesting and the procurement of grass feed.

Despite the current slowdown, the **official forecast** projects GDP growth to be 4.1% by the end of 2025.<sup>xlviii</sup> At the same time, the **Eurasian Development Bank** has revised its forecast for Belarus's economic growth in 2025 upwards - from 2.6% to 3%. According to the bank's analysts, the growth will be primarily driven by **domestic demand**, with increased consumption supported by rising wages and continued strong demand for consumer credit.<sup>xlix</sup>

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