



CENTENARY POLICY
INSTITUTE

Belarus: At the Edge of Radical Change

Based on closed door roundtable discussion
held at Vilnius Klubas, Zilvinas Mecelis Library

On July 4th, 2023

**Key points, conclusions and
recommendations**

PUTTING BELARUS ON AGENDA AHEAD OF NATO SUMMIT

Belarus issue has long been overlooked by Western governments that have come to terms to 'take over' by Moscow's FSB agents and now reinforced by the arrival of Wagner mercenaries.

Situation in Belarus can change very quickly just as we saw recently in Russia. The notion that Belarus regime is stable as viewed by many in the West and that it will remain so simply is incorrect. There is a thin line between stability and fragility and Belarus is leaning towards the latter.

Yet, until recently, Belarus was not even on the agenda of NATO meeting in Vilnius to be held on July 11th and 12th next week.

We strongly believe this is a major strategic error as the fall of Lukashenko regime and return of Belarus to democratic path could accelerate the fall of Putin's regime with Belarus serving as a cornerstone of security in the region.

On July 4th , the Centenary Policy Institute convened a group of 35 political, military and diplomatic experts to analyse the current situation in Belarus and propose action point for NATO leaders and EU politicians how to secure freedom for Belarus people and defend it against Kremlin interventions.

High Level Conclusions

- **We believe Belarus requires a differentiated approach by Western governments** because at least 60% of its population is in favour of democratic change compared to just 20% in Russia
- **Contrary to Western narrative Belarus population including its weak army** is NOT satisfied with status quo i.e 'Russian take over' and is waiting for another opportunity of democratic change and Western support in this process.
- **The arrival of Wagner mercenaries and relocation of nuclear weapons to Belarus** creates an urgency for NATO leaders meeting in Vilnius on July 11th and 12th next week to address Lukashenka regime challenge head on
- **It is a major strategic error to put Belarus and Russia in the same basket** 'as hostile' countries and apply one size fits both sanctions and visa policy
- **Belarus army is small, poorly trained.** It is an imitation army not real demonstration of power largely used to protect Lukashenko personally and not any match to invading Russian forces
- **Democratic Belarus** is central to securing peace in the region as part of final settlement when the war in Ukraine ends. **Democratic Belarus** is the best possible sanction against Putin's regime
- **The fall of Lukashenko's regime** who has been enjoying a symbiotic relationship with Putin would accelerate the collapse of current regime in Kremlin
- **Visa policy requires better screening to prevent abuse by Lukashenko cronies.** The EU needs to introduce a centralized data system of biometric data to prevent regime agents traveling inside the EU on different passports
- **The fact the West did not respond properly in 2020 and 2021** in Belarus encouraged Putin's war in Ukraine

Proposed Action Steps

- 1. Promote the view in Western media** that Belarus is a sovereign country with a democratically minded population that has been a hostage to Putin and Lukashenko's regime.
- 2. Prepare for best case scenario** of when Lukashenko regime falls to rapidly offer Belarus a path to democracy, EU accession , security similar to Ukraine. Make Belarus part of Ukraine's end of war success story
- 3. To prepare for worst case scenario** (nuclear strike from the territory of Belarus) or Wagner troops being used to cross red lines into NATO (Poland/Lithuania)
- 4. To keep supporting legitimate Belarus leadership**, not the Lukashenko regime.
- 5. To have a tailored approach towards sanctions:** every person who directly or indirectly supports Kremlin invasion of Ukraine, or Lukashenko regime crimes should face sanctions; every other Belarus citizen should have a possibility to travel to the EU.
- 6. Signaling is also about good signals.** What would happen if things change - EU has a comprehensive plan of economic support to a future democratic Belarus of 3 bn Eur from 2021, which will be activated once country embarks on democratic transition
7. Increased financial support to democratic Belarus leaders and families of political prisoners.

Belarus Possible End Game Scenarios

- 1. Full integration with Russia** (like Chechnya) Very negative. Likely if Russia is successful in Ukraine. We see low probability of this scenario if the West continues to support Ukraine until final victory for Ukraine.
- 2. Status quo.** Negative. Likely in a frozen conflict/long war scenario. Assumes Lukashenko or his successor maintains the grand bargain with Kremlin regime of 'pseudo sovereignty' and de facto take over.
- 3. Regaining independence, in limbo between Russia and the West** (Similar to Kazakhstan) Modestly positive. Possible if Russia suffers heavy defeat in Ukraine and becomes weaker, unable to exert its influence. Meanwhile, the West and Ukraine are unprepared to take full control. This is our central case scenario unless the West acts now.
- 4. Regaining full independence, democratic rule and launch Western integration** (Like Ukraine) Highly positive. Possible if Russia suffers heavy defeat in Ukraine and is severely weakened.

This scenario , which we favour and promote, looks currently unlikely, requires NATO, the EU and US to develop tools and incentives to provide a clear path to EU accession, wealth creation and normalization of Belarus relationship with the West. It requires the fall of Lukashenko regime.

Lukashenko factor & Kremlin's Grip on Power

The death of Lukashenko would be a determining factor, which would trigger events that would lead Belarus out of current status quo.

Which direction the country takes - Western or towards Moscow - depends on Western response and desire to offer democratic forces a chance to free themselves from current regime agents and Russia's grip on power in Minsk.

Moscow will most certainly make an attempt to capture and hold Belarus regime and appoint its own successor if the Western powers allow this to happen and do not intervene on behalf of democratic movement.

Belarus Game Changer for Eastern Europe

The fall of Kremlin's crony regime in Minsk would be a major blow to Putin's image of 'invincibility' far greater than the challenge by Prigozhin. It is a blow that we think he is unlikely to survive.

It would, we think spark further unrest in the Russian Federation and accelerate the end of war in Ukraine. The disappearance of Northern front would be a major relief for Ukrainian armed forces that can then concentrate their effort in the South of the country.

Positive Change Catalysts (apart from Ukrainian defeat of Russian army)

- A. Better access to independent information in Belarus to understand Russian propaganda.
- B. Understanding Belarus in the West (getting rid of Moscow narrative).
- C. Differentiated Approach and Support for Democratic Movement
- D. Clear western alternative to the status quo - Western roadmap.
- E. Military support for democratic forces
- F. Reclaiming the historical narrative of Belarus
- G. Financial Aid
- H. Exile Options for Belarus Generals and Security Apparatus