№ 16 (July and August 2020)

MINSK BAROMETER

Monitoring of foreign policy and regional security

Dear readers!

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We are pleased to present the sixteenth issue of the Minsk Barometer, which analyzes Belarus's foreign policy and security status in the months of July and August of 2020.

One way or another, the political crisis in Belarus has affected all of the foreign policy focus areas. For the first time in the history of our monitoring, the level of regional tension has reached the orange zone.

The relationship with Russia changed abruptly: the aggravation recorded in July was replaced by emphatically pro-Russia stance in August. Russia has become Belarus's dominant foreign policy partner for a long time.

The presidential campaign disrupted the years-long normalization process with the European Union. Minsk's relationships with Poland and the Baltic States have become particularly tense.

A significant slack was reported in bilateral cooperation between Belarus and China. At the same time, official Minsk emphasized the significant role of China for the external world.

Minsk's relations with the United States were also profoundly affected. Washington spoke about the possible return of sanctions, while the Belarusian leadership explicitly blamed the U.S. for preparing a coup.

Political engagement with Ukraine intensified in July and early August, and economic contacts markedly revived. However, the political crisis in Belarus resulted in a collapse of political contacts. So far, it has not had a direct impact on the economy.

The security agencies and the army started playing an unprecedented role in political processes, and the overall national security status can be referred to as a crisis situation. The regional security situation along the perimeter of Belarus's borders has seriously deteriorated.

Yours respectfully,

Dzianis Melyantsou,

Editor, Minsk Barometer
Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations,
Belarus's Foreign Policy Programme
Coordinator

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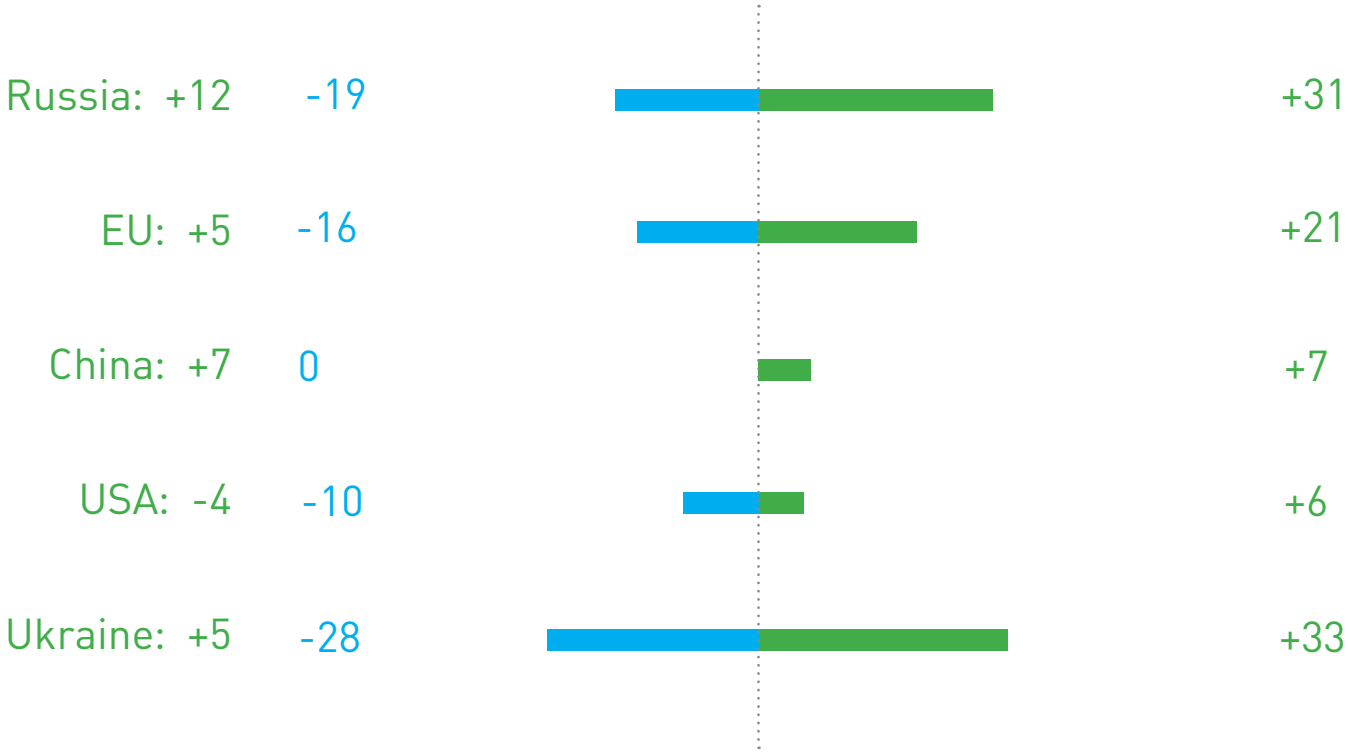
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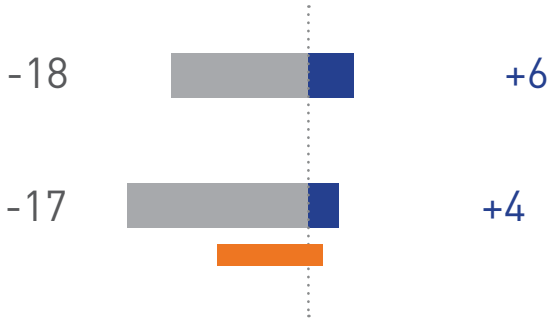
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Relations development indices:



Security:

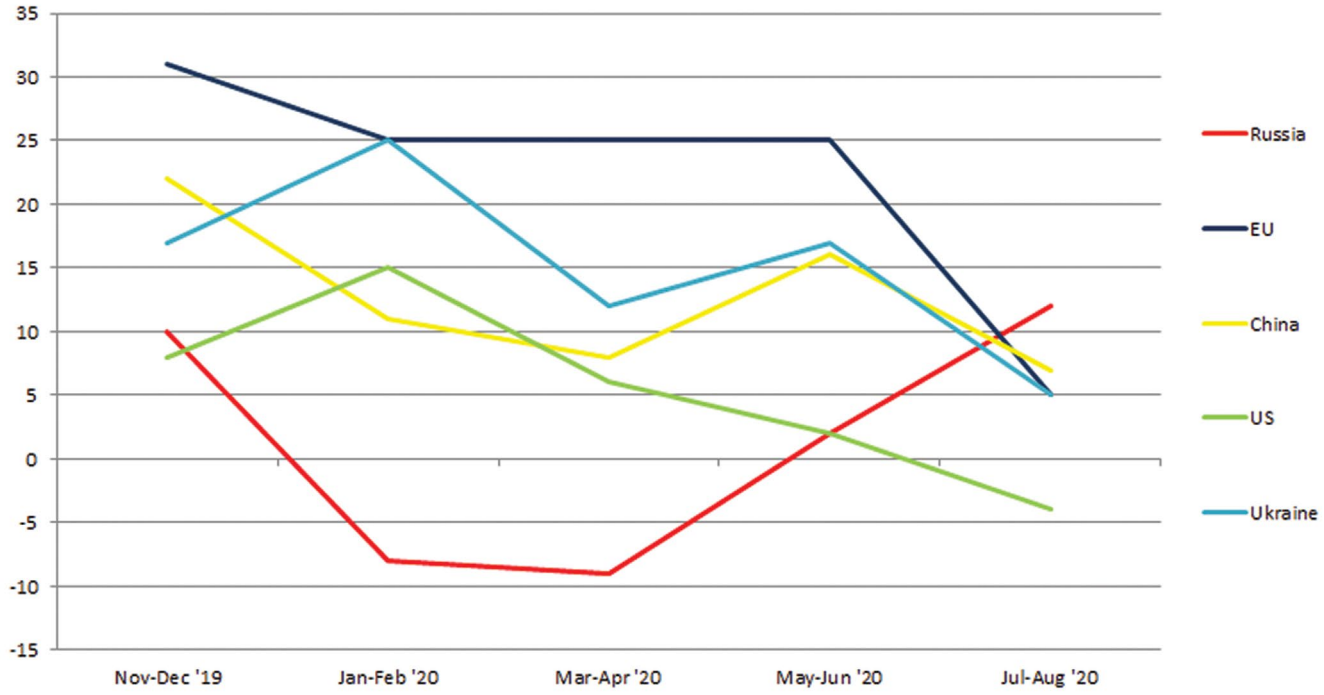


National: -12

Level of regional tension: -13
(orange level)

The orange level indicates military preparations in the region. Growing tensions. Situation is threatening.

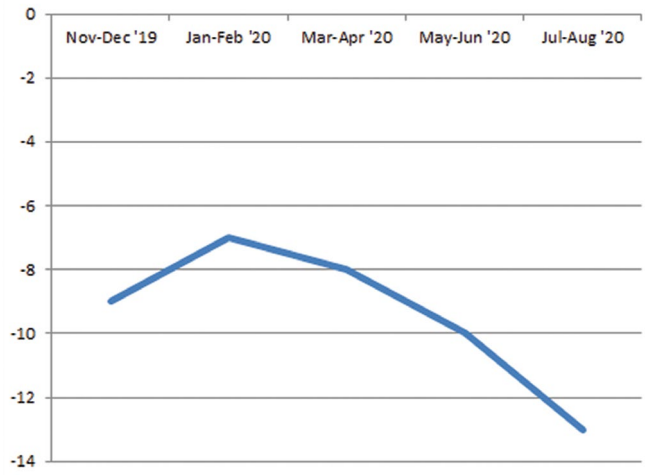
Dynamics of foreign policy indices



National security



Level of regional tension



Relationship with Russia



Aggregate index: +12
Positive points: +31
Negative points: -19

Trends

1. Belarus's relations with Russia pivoted: the aggravation observed in July was replaced by the emphatically pro-Russia policy in August.

2. The course of the election campaign and the repression that followed turned Russia into a fully dominant foreign policy partner of Belarus for a long time.

Developments and processes

Political agenda

In July, the political agenda was determined by the Belarusian authorities' losing control of the election campaign, and in August, by protests against election fraud and excessive violence of law enforcement officials against protesters. In the course of the election campaign, the Belarusian authorities accused Russia of supporting alternative candidates, funding their media campaigns, orchestrating mass riots and even acts of terror in Belarus. Despite those accusations, the general trend towards the alleviation of the confrontation remained – despite even the arrest of mercenaries working for a Russian private military contractor. The Russian and Belarusian leaderships resumed contacts, and the Kremlin responded to the accusations unemotionally. The resolution of Russia's internal problems (constitutional reform) presumably made it less vulnerable to media attacks from Minsk.

As soon as the election process concluded and repressions started against protesters, Belarus's relationships with the EU, the United States and all of its neighbors, except Russia, deteriorated all the way to a grave crisis. Russia became Belarus's only active foreign policy partner and de facto Minsk's foreign policy representative. An important factor of the political background in the past two months is the fact that Russian President Vladimir Putin convened the Security Council of the Russian Federation on four occasions to address the Belarus issue.

Throughout July, new arrests were made based on cases against presidential contenders Viktar Babaryka and Siarhiej Cichanoŭski. The arrests were accompanied by the exposure of sinister designs of "puppeteers" "from the East".

On June 25, Aliaksandr Lukashenka said: "It is obvious that puppeteers are standing behind them. They are on both sides. They live both in Poland and throwing us stuff from Russia. We will talk about it with president Putin when we meet anytime soon, but this situation is very complicated. State-of-the-art fake technologies are being employed, there is foreign interference in our elections, in our domestic affairs." Peskov reacted to these words: "We can state explicitly that the Russian Federation has never interfered, does not interfere and is not going to interfere in anybody's electoral processes, especially those of our ally, Belarus."

Sviatlana Cichanoŭskaja's joint headquarters was also accused of having contacts with Russia.

On July 29, 33 mercenaries of so-called PMC Wagner were detained in Belarus. Official Minsk accused the detainees of preparing terrorist attacks in Belarus. Furthermore, Chief of the Security Council Andrej Raŭkoŭ said that about 200 Russian mercenaries had already arrived in Belarus, and two more groups were preparing to enter Belarus in Pskov and Smolensk Regions of Russia.

On July 30, the Investigative Committee of Belarus reported that the militants were detained as part of the investigation of Siarhiej Cichanoŭski's criminal case. Russian Consul in Belarus Kirill Pletnev said after his meeting with the Russian citizens detained in Belarus that Minsk's position on the possible conspiracy of the detainees involving Cichanoŭski and Mikalaj Statkievič was "far-fetched and invalid".

Russian Ambassador Mezentsev and other Russian officials made an assumption that the fighters were in transit through Belarus. But Lukashenka disagreed. *"An attempt is being made to hide the tail in Russia and say that they had almost agreed the dispatch of that group – it's complete nonsense,"* he said during a meeting with KGB Chief Valier Vakulčyk.

On August 4, Lukashenka said: *"Today we received reports about another unit, which has been moved to the south."*

On August 6, in an interview with Ukrainian journalist Dmytro Gordon, Lukashenka said: *"I am sorry that these detained Wagner fighters are connected with him, but on the other hand, I think that he is a puppet in the wrong hands. He is not the one who makes decisions ... such decisions are made at a slightly higher level – by deputy ministers."*

On August 14, all of the detained fighters were returned to Russia. There are no reports about any investigation into the case of the Wagner mercenaries.

Herman Gref and the EEU

On July 3, President and Chairman of the Executive Board of Sberbank of Russia Herman Gref visited Minsk. Lukashenka invited Sberbank to participate in funding "significant volumes of our economy." Sberbank is the holder of a large portion of debts of Belarusian state enterprises; Gref on various occasions has mentioned amounts from USD 3 to 7 billion.

On July 17, Minsk hosted a meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council, where Belarus proposed a draft of strategic priorities for the development of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) for the next five years (it received preliminary approval); measures to remove trade barriers, as well as the creation of a map of industrialization and some other issues were also discussed.

On July 22, during his speech at the State Duma, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said that he "deeply believes" in the potential of the Union Treaty with Belarus and the Union State integration roadmaps. According to Mishustin, *"if we jointly create a common space based on these maps, specifically, if we adopt <...> a single tax code, manage to unify our rates and approaches, then we will be able to talk about the mechanism of energy pricing."*

On July 24, the Russian Foreign Ministry spoke against the intervention of Brussels in Belarus's internal affairs.

It appears that throughout July, Russia (as in the previous period, i.e. May–June) refrained from any sharp response to both active initiatives of the Belarusian side (arrest of the leadership of Belgazprombank and detention of the Wagner fighters, accusations of interference in the election campaign, partial non-payment for gas) and requests and demands (refinancing of loans, tax maneuver, removal of trade barriers, opening of the border). Russia was consistently pushing Belarus towards the adoption of the integration roadmaps.

Russian crisis management

Russia became one of the first and few countries to congratulate Lukashenka on winning the election. The density of contacts has multiplied since August 9: in the first two weeks after the election, Lukashenka called Putin every day. On August 15, Lukashenka said that in response to his request Putin promised to send law enforcers to protect Belarus's borders. The Kremlin specified that the assistance would be provided in case the situation got out of control.

In reality, instead of military assistance, Moscow sent a group of TV specialists to Belarus – to work instead of those BT professionals who were on strike.

On August 27, Putin said that in response to Lukashenka's request, Russia had formed a reserve of law enforcement bodies, which would be sent to Belarus if necessary. According to Putin, during the negotiations with his Belarusian counterpart they came to the conclusion that at that time there was no need to use that reserve.

Throughout August, Putin spoke about the Kremlin's recognition of the results of the Belarusian presidential election at least five times.

Unresolved issues

Close communication, the Kremlin's support of Lukashenka during the political crisis, willingness to help bolster the state border have not resulted in the resolution of the bilateral problems that had accumulated since 2018. The only solution – the mutual recognition of visas – is slowly moving towards ratification, although it would be safe to say that it is still on the agenda.

The following issues remain unresolved:

- natural gas prices and transit through the Russian territory for deliveries to Belarus;
- Belarus's debt for natural gas that has accrued since the beginning of the year due to Belarus's payment for gas at rates determined by Minsk outside the contractual framework;
- compensation for the oil tax maneuver;
- nuclear power plant, as the originally scheduled period for commissioning had long been over;
- refinancing of Belarusian state and corporate debts;
- Russian border remained closed to Belarusians (except for rotation workers and those taking care of sick relatives);
- access of Belarusian goods to the Russian market;
- integration, roadmaps, the Union State.

Forecast

It is assumed that all of the pending issues, and above all economic support for Belarus, along with military assistance and special forces, will be resolved during Lukashenka's visit to Moscow.

There is some skepticism about the effectiveness of the personal meeting between the two heads of state. First, during 2018–2020, personal meetings of the presidents did not yield real results. Second, as in the past two years, the difference in the approaches of the Russian and Belarusian leaders to the set of problems at hand is now evident. As before, the

Belarusian leadership believes that Russia itself is interested in helping Belarus in any area as soon as it gets a respective request and does not require any additional motivation. For its part, the Kremlin, as in many previous cases, is convinced that Belarus has found itself in such critical conditions that it should agree to any requirements of the Russian side in return for assistance. Third, the Kremlin believes that Belarus is in a political crisis and requires dialogue between the authorities and society, while Lukashenka sees no crisis, but only the influence of external forces and illegal protest, which makes sense to suppress exclusively using force.

Relationship with the European Union



Aggregate index: +5
Positive points: +21
Negative points: -16

Trends

1. The presidential campaign in Belarus has disrupted the years-long normalization process between Belarus and the EU.

2. Amid the political crisis in Belarus, an escalation spiral between Minsk and European capitals began to unwind, which is manifested in extremely negative mutual rhetoric, sanctions applied by the EU and threats of countermeasures by Belarus. Minsk has developed particularly tense relations with Poland and the Baltic States.

3. At the same time, both Minsk and many EU capitals still desire not to burn down all bridges and to keep at least minimal channels for official communication and political dialogue.

Events and developments

As soon as the presidential campaign-2020 kicked off, it was obvious that it would produce a negative impact on the relationship between Belarus and the EU. However, there were reasons to believe that the extent of this effect would be limited. In many EU member states and institutions, an unofficial opinion prevailed that it was essential to avoid a reset of the relations back to the level of 2011–2012, when in the wake of the presidential election of December 2010, Brussels imposed selective sanctions on a large number of Belarusian officials and de facto froze its contacts with Minsk at the minimal working level.

The reason why the EU is reluctant to relive the experience of ten years ago is simple and obvious – the fear that another collapse of the bilateral framework will bring about negative consequences for the sovereignty of Belarus. In this case, Minsk would again be left face to face with Moscow, unable to use the relationship with the EU to compensate for Russia's pressure. This would inevitably increase the military and political risks and challenges for the EU itself, especially for its member states bordering Belarus. Therefore, even despite numerous negative statements made by the EU as early as during the election campaign, European capitals have generally sought to take a cautious stance on the future of their relations with Belarus.

Apparently, numerous discussions of Belarusian diplomats with European partners, including at the ministerial level, were conducted in this cautious manner. For example, prior to August 9, i.e. the polling day, Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makiej had a number of telephone conversations with his counterparts from the EU, and on July 24, he visited Latvia, where negotiations with the head of the Latvian Foreign Ministry were held in

Silene close to the state border. According to official reports, both sides were satisfied with the visit.

Therefore, despite the inevitable cooling of the relations between Belarus and the EU, something extremely serious had to happen as a result of the presidential campaign to cause their radical breakdown. In the EU's opinion, this is exactly what happened. Excessive brutality of the Belarusian security services and especially the footage of beatings of detainees during the protests literally shocked the European public. Under the circumstances, it was difficult to expect anything else from the EU than extremely negative evaluation and imposition of sanctions, which were announced as early as August 19. All the more so because many observers, both in Belarus and in the EU, quickly came to the conclusion that the fall of Lukashenka's regime was inevitable. Therefore, it is likely that the EU's initial reaction was at least partially based on such expectations.

Lithuania and Poland expectedly took the lead in formulating Europe's response to the situation in Belarus. This was expressed both in the toughest rhetoric against official Minsk, in making active proposals on the Belarus issue for the entire EU, and in more tangible support for the opposition leaders. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia went to greater lengths than the other EU member states and institutions in adopting sanctions: they quickly introduced selective sanctions at the national level against 30 Belarusian officials, including Lukashenka, and urged the entire EU to follow suit.

However, at the EU-27 level, the idea of including the current leader of Belarus in the sanctions list is not yet completely supported, which attests to their willingness to maintain channels of communication with Minsk. According to the press service of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, this message was heard during the telephone conversations between Makiej and the foreign ministers of Latvia (August 12), Finland (August 18), and Spain (August 19). Apparently, this idea is also shared by Berlin and Paris. Even despite Lukashenka's refusal to communicate with the heavyweights of European politics – Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron and Charles Michel – at the peak of the political confrontation in August. The refusal can probably be attributed to Lukashenka's thinking there was no valid subject to talk about, as the EU initially started to demand nationwide dialogue with the aim of organizing either a peaceful transition of power or a new election in Belarus. After August 9, the latter (a new election) would be tantamount for official Minsk to the former (Lukashenka's leaving office), so these demands were not acceptable. Nor was any international mediation: whether by the OSCE or individual EU member states.

Official Minsk, for its part, was fast to accuse specific EU states of supporting attempts of unconstitutional transition of power in Belarus. In addition to Poland and Lithuania, the Czech Republic was mentioned. The main claims against Warsaw and Prague was probably originally made because it was from their territory that the most active Telegram channels, which seek to coordinate the Belarusian protests, operate. On August 27, the chargé d'affaires a.i. of Poland in Belarus was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where a strong protest was made to him *"in connection with Poland's explicit attempts to directly interfere in Belarus's internal affairs."*

Moreover, Minsk escalated the situation in its relations with the EU making statements of possible aggression on the part of NATO and strengthening of its own army group in the westernmost Hrodna region, which borders on Lithuania and Poland. As for the national sanctions imposed by the Baltic States, in response Lukashenka pledged to put in place counter-sanctions. Specifically, he made an instruction to reroute the transit flows of Belarusian cargos away from the Lithuanian ports. At the same time, the Belarusian authorities also sent signals to partners across the EU voicing their willingness to maintain communication channels. One such signal is the special statement by Makiej, as well as the address to MEPs, adopted by the speakers of both houses of the Belarusian parliament.

According to the Belstat National Statistical Committee, two-way trade between Belarus and the European Union amounted to USD 6,34 million in January–July 2020 (down by 15.7% year-on-year). Belarusian exports reached USD 2,653.4 million, a drop by 24.9% from the

first seven months of 2019. Imports from the EU countries amounted to USD 3,686.6 million, down by 7.5% from the same period in 2019. Two-way trade therefore came to a deficit of USD 1,033.2 million for Belarus.

Forecast

After August 9, a new crisis chapter in the relationship between Belarus and the EU officially began, which will determine the evolution of the relations in the foreseeable future. Despite the sanctions already imposed by some member states and their inevitable expansion by the whole EU, it is not yet clear how deep the relations will "plunge".

The situation is largely similar to that which emerged after the 2010 presidential election. However, the overall international context makes it a lot more dangerous for both Belarus and the European Union. In particular, the high level of geopolitical tension in Eastern Europe and on the entire continent, as well as the pervasive uncertainty about the future system of international relations amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing global economic crisis and the upcoming U.S. presidential election cause special risks for Minsk and EU capitals that have been unprecedented in the recent decades. This implies some additional incentives to contain the escalation of the conflict in the Belarus–EU relations. However, the same factor makes any mistake that both sides are likely to make in conditions of the aggravating public conflict markedly costlier.

It is safe to expect that the EU's sanctions will be followed by some sort of response from Minsk. For example, it is highly probable that Lukashenka's threat to reroute Belarusian transit flows from Lithuanian seaports will become a reality. At least, active preparatory work in this area is currently underway.

Relationship with China



Aggregate index: +7
Positive points: +7
Negative points: 0

Trends

1. The Belarusian side emphasizes China's crucial role for the external audience.

2. A significant decrease in bilateral cooperation.

Events and developments

In July and August, cooperation between Belarus and China became considerably less active, including due to the prevalence of the domestic agenda in Belarus – the presidential election. According to a statement by the press service of the Belarusian head of state, Xi Jinping was the first leader to congratulate Aliaksandr Lukashenka on winning the presidential election, even before the Belarusian CEC announced the official outcomes.

On the same day, August 10, Lukashenka visited the site of the project of the Belarusian National Biotechnology Corporation implemented in association with China's CITIC Group – as follow-up of the meeting that discussed this project in June. The Belarusian side further repeatedly emphasized the fact that it was the Chinese leader, not Russian or any other, who was the first to send his congratulations.

In the official Chinese media, the perspective looks somewhat different, for example, in August, the Chinese audience of Xinhua News Agency read the rather discreet official congratulations by Xi Jinping, with the translation into Chinese of a series of official messages by Lukashenka's press service, the Belarusian Interior Ministry and other agencies focusing on the results of the election and the course of protests. The Belarusian side notably cited some extracts of congratulations by Xi Jinping (for example, references to "all-weather friendship", "iron brothers", the significance of the bilateral relations for the Chinese leader), which were not included into the message disseminated by Chinese agencies and media. The Belarus agenda was also covered by Xinhua, which quoted official statements by the Russian side – declarations by president Putin, the Russian Foreign Ministry, etc.

A spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry was addressed questions on Belarus several times during working briefings. On August 11, answering a journalist from Russia's Sputnik about China's position on protests against the recognition of the election results, Zhao Lijian replied that the Chinese side *"took note of the relevant messages, and hopes and believes that the situation in Belarus will be able to stabilize quickly."* On August 19, the spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry was once again asked a question about China's stance on major protests in Belarus by a journalist of the Chinese edition Huangqu (Global Times). Zhao Lijian referred to the situation in Belarus as "difficult", but said he hoped and was confident that *"the Belarusian side will be able to maintain political stability and public peace using its own resources."*

Despite the "China roadmap" promoted by the Belarusian side, Belarus has not appointed its ambassador to China for three months now. Mikalaj Snapkoŭ was relieved of his duties and came back to Minsk in June after being appointed first deputy premier and remained the chief Belarusian official responsible for China, because he continued to head the Belarus–China intergovernmental committee on cooperation in his new capacity. In late August, it was reported that Chinese Ambassador to Belarus Cui Qiming was planning to conclude his diplomatic mission to Belarus.

The months of July and August saw some cooperation progress in education and agribusiness. It included the opening of the Belarus–China Friendship Center at the Minsk Region Institute of Education Development, and Belarusian State Technological University signed an agreement on the training of technical specialists with Yunfu Technical College and Guangdong Union for International Scientific and Technical Cooperation with CIS Countries. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Belarus signed an agreement on agro cooperation as part of the project of an industrial international cooperation park in the Caofeidian bonded area, Hebei province.

Great Stone

During the two months under review, OOO Photoprint (with Russian capital) was registered as a resident of the China–Belarus Industrial Park with a project to establish an Industry 4.0 data center and printing business.

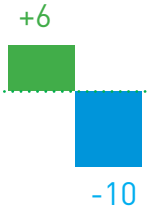
In July and August, the CBIP held the "day of electric transport" (with the involvement of the Minister of Energy of Belarus, as well as other representatives of Belarusian state agencies), took part in the creation of the Alliance of Special Economic Zones, which includes industrial zones in China, Djibouti, Laos, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, etc., as well as in the first world conference of e-commerce, and held a number of online conferences for investors and in individual sectors of cooperation.

Forecast

The two countries may restore the previously high level of bilateral cooperation when the domestic and foreign policies of Belarus come to a relative balance. The agenda will also be broadened by the appointment of a Belarusian ambassador to China, a key position, which has remained vacant for an unprecedented period, causing a situation that is somewhat inconsistent with the declared policy of "all-weather" friendship, comprehensive strategic partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation. Joint projects in Belarus are still suffering from the coronavirus pandemic, as China, among others, maintains strict epidemiological restrictions, which affects the cross-country mobility of Chinese workers.

The promotion of economic and financial cooperation will primarily depend on the economic situation in Belarus itself. The introduction of sanctions against Belarus and Belarusian officials by the EU and the U.S. and restrictions on access to capital markets, which will complicate the restoration of financial stability, will also produce a negative impact on the Belarus–China relationship. It is rather unlikely that under the circumstances Belarus will receive its second (this year) government loan from China, especially now that the China–U.S. tensions have aggravated.

Relationship with the U.S.



Aggregate index: -4
Positive points: +6
Negative points: -10

Trends

1. Following the presidential election and post-election protests, Belarus's political relations with the U.S. markedly deteriorated. Washington spoke about the resumption of sanctions, whereas the Belarusian leadership directly accused the U.S. of preparing a coup.

2. At the same time, the U.S. acts more cautiously in comparison with the previous rounds of escalation. This is due to the fear of provoking aggressive responses from Russia and destabilizing the region.

Events and developments

Just as in the case of the other dimensions of Belarus's foreign policy, in the relationship with the U.S., the period under review was clearly divided into the "before" and "after" the election, with distinctly different focuses. Anyway, the Belarusian presidential campaign was repeatedly addressed throughout July and August.

As early as July 3, while congratulating Belarusians on Independence Day, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo called on the Belarusian government to do everything possible to ensure a free and fair election process. According to Pompeo, the United States *"is encouraged by the growing relationship between our two nations and is committed to assisting Belarus to develop and diversify its economy."* On July 16, Morgan Ortagus, spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State, expressed *"deep concerns about the reports of mass protests and detentions of peaceful activists."*

On July 22, Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makiej and U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale had a telephone conversation, initiated by the U.S. According to the Foreign Ministry's press service, at Hale's request, Makiej *"provided a detailed report of the nuances of the presidential campaign in Belarus."*

In the run-up to the election date, relations with the U.S. had been developing in a constructive manner. The intention to continue the policy of normalization was stresses by the Belarusian side at the top level. In his congratulations on Independence Day of the United States, the Belarusian president said that the *"promotion of strong, constructive relations with the United States based on common values and priorities is one of the main objectives of Belarusian foreign policy."*

Belarus continued importing American crude. On July 16, the second 80,000-tonne batch of White Eagle Blend (WEB) was purchased. This grade is a blend of three grades (two American and one Canadian). It had been specially developed for European refineries working mostly with Russian Urals. A tanker with American oil bound for Belarus arrived at the port of Klaipeda on August 9.

The two countries continued making efforts to return the ambassadors. On July 20, Alieh Kraučanka, who had previously served as deputy foreign minister and was in charge of Belarus's relations with the West, was expectedly appointed Ambassador of Belarus to the U.S. From 2008 to 2014, he had already headed the Belarusian diplomatic mission to Washington, D.C., as a charge d'affaires.

On August 5, the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs held a hearing with Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Julie Fisher, who had previously been nominated by President Trump as the U.S. Ambassador to Belarus. She said she was looking forward to working with the U.S. Congress to *"to support Belarus's efforts to protect its sovereignty and independence in the face of unprecedented political pressure aimed at undermining both"[...] "Belarus should not be forced to depend on any single nation for its prosperity or security."* However, in her opinion, the U.S. is not asking Belarus to choose between East and West. Fisher recalled that following the withdrawal of the U.S. ambassador in 2008, the bilateral relationship with Belarus languished for the better part of a decade, but *"after Russia's illegal seizure and occupation of Crimea and its manufactured war in Ukraine's Donbas region, we began to see signs of interest from the Belarusian side for increased diplomatic and commercial ties."*

According to Fischer, Belarus is increasingly pursuing American investment. If appointed Ambassador, she intends to support the creation of an American Chamber of Commerce in Minsk and a Washington D.C.-based U.S. business council focused on Belarus. According to her, since the Belarusian government's March 2019 decision to lift its cap on staffing, the number of American employees at Embassy in Minsk has already grown from ten to fourteen. Notably, Julie Fisher told the House Committee that the U.S. "has an opportunity in Belarus" and "for the sake of regional security and stability, we cannot allow this opportunity to pass us by."

Prior to Fischer's appointment as ambassador, the Embassy in Minsk is still headed by a chargé d'affaires ad interim. In July, Jenifer Moore was succeeded by Jeffrey Giauque, who had previously represented U.S. interests in Serbia and Croatia. At a briefing on July 30, he said he expected that 2020 would be "even more positive" in terms of cooperation with Belarus both within international organizations and on a bilateral basis. He also thanked Belarus for long-term positive and constructive relations with the United States in multilateral forums. In the UN, the United States co-authored several resolutions on human trafficking initiated by Belarus.

Despite this trend, there were negative pre-election events in the period that overshadowed the bilateral relationship. For example, the withdrawal of the U.S. from the Open Skies Treaty was perceived in Minsk as another step towards the dismantling of the foundations of strategic stability. A joint statement by Belarus and Russia was released on that occasion on July 6. It reads, in particular, that Washington's withdrawal from the treaty *"can seriously undermine the architecture of common European security and the system of arms control agreements."*

On July 29, political consultant Vitali Shkliarov was detained in Homiel. He permanently resides in the U.S. and holds a U.S. diplomatic passport. According to the official version, he was consulting the administrator of groups in various social networks under the common name "Country for Life", the project initiated by Siarhiej Cichanoŭski. On August 7, Shkliarov was charged with the organization and preparation of activities that grossly violate public order or participation in such activities (part 1 of Article 342 of the Criminal Code of Belarus), which envisages punishment in the form of a fine or imprisonment for a period of up to three years. Shkliarov's case is under the control of the Department of State and has potential to become an issue of concern in the bilateral relations.

The presidential election and especially the wave of protests and repressions that followed became a turning point in Minsk's relationship with the United States. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo issued a statement as early as August 11, in which he called the election in Belarus neither free nor fair. He called on the Belarusian authorities to respect the right of all citizens to participate in peaceful assemblies, refrain from the use of force and release

those who had been illegally detained. By the end of August, Pompeo had made a number of other statements on Belarus. On August 13, in an interview for Radio Liberty the secretary of state said that the discontinuation of crude oil supplies to Belarus could be considered as a possible sanction.

On August 15, the head of the Department of State welcomed the release of some previously detained protesters but stated that "it was not enough". Later, on August 20 he "urged" the government of Belarus to accept the OSCE chairmanship's offer to facilitate dialogue and engage all stakeholders.

On August 17, U.S. President Donald Trump also spoke on the Belarus issue. He said that a terrible situation was unfolding in Belarus, which resulted in mass protests and strikes after the presidential election, which the protesters believed had been rigged. Trump said that the United States was closely watching the situation in Belarus.

Representatives of the U.S. Department of State discussed the situation in Belarus with Sviatlana Cichanoŭskaja and Russian and Ukrainian officials. During a meeting between Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun, the Russian foreign minister warned the United States against any form of interference in Belarus's internal affairs. The representative of the Department of State, for his part, said that Washington could consider new sanctions against Russia if it were to openly intervene with the use of force in Belarusian affairs in order to extend the term of the current president Aliaksandr Lukashenka.

On August 21, when speaking at the Dziaržynski farm, Lukashenka openly declared for the first time that protests in Belarus were planned and orchestrated by the U.S. This statement will obviously affect the bilateral relations and become a stumbling block for the normalization that has been going on for more than five years now.

During the period under review, the U.S. did not make any explicit statements concerning its intention to slap sanctions on Belarus, although the possibility was discussed in Washington. Seven officials were considered, against whom personal sanctions could be imposed. These are more lenient measures than those discussed by the European Union and those that had been previously imposed by Washington against the Belarusian authorities. Obviously, the U.S. is still in the process of formulating its new policy on Minsk and is monitoring developments in the country. Caution exercised in decision-making concerning Belarus can be attributed to the more geopolitical (in comparison with the EU) view of relationships in the region and reluctance to provoke Russia to take action to protect its sphere of interests.

Forecast

As the U.S. presidential election approaches, Washington will be growing less interested in the political crisis in Belarus. Other regional issues, such as the poisoning of Alexey Navalny and negotiations over strategic stability with Russia, will also serve as distractions. Nevertheless, the United States is likely to impose limited personal sanctions against Belarusian officials, but for the time being will refrain from more substantial actions, such as sanctions against enterprises and individual sectors of the economy. Oil trade will likely be suspended.

Relationship with Ukraine



Aggregate index: +5
Positive points: +33
Negative points: -28

Trends

1. In July and early August, political engagement intensified, and contacts in the economy revived.

2. The commencement of the active phase of the political crisis in Belarus and the escalation during the post-election days led to a disruption of political contacts. So far, this has not produced a direct impact on the economy; however, the persistence of negative trends will slow down the implementation of new joint projects and may seriously damage two-way trade.

Events and developments

Politics

July and the beginning of August can be referred to as a period of hope in both politics and media. On July 3, Ambassador of Belarus to Ukraine Ihar Sokal gave an interview to the Interfax-Ukraine News Agency, where he commented on ways to restore the rate of trade, implementation of joint manufacturing projects, as well as the E-40 waterway. On the same day, an online meeting of the organizing committee for the Third Forum of the Regions of Belarus and Ukraine was held. On July 7, Ambassador of Ukraine to Belarus Igor Kizim gave an interview to the magazine *Belarus*, saying that he was positive that the economic and political lines of cooperation between the two countries needed to be developed, including at the regional level. On July 8, Serhiy Nayev, commander of the United Forces Operation in Donbas, said that there were no military threats from Belarus. That statement de facto stopped some media outlets from speculating about the danger from the north. In July, despite the quarantine measures in place, the two countries opened a simplified border-crossing procedure for citizens involved in wild herb, mushroom and berry harvesting. Furthermore, on July 30, Belarus and Ukraine agreed to strengthen the protection of the state border ahead of the presidential election in Belarus. The following day, the Council of Ministers of Belarus agreed to sign a protocol on information exchange between the border agencies of the two countries.

The high point of the month that proved to be positive for the relationship between the two countries was the invitation of the Belarusian foreign minister by his Ukrainian counterpart to participate (as an honorary guest) in the meetings of the Lublin Triangle, the new format of political consultations between Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine.

The Wagner fighters case, which initially unfolded in a positive way for the bilateral relations, but ended in an exchange of negative statements, should be treated as a separate development. After the detention of the mercenaries, the Ukrainian charge d'affaires was invited to the Belarusian Foreign Ministry and the possibility for extraditing the detainees was discussed. This option was officially announced by president Zelensky; the same issues (in addition to the promotion of cooperation) were addressed during a telephone conversation between the foreign ministers and the presidents of the two countries.

However, further events, Lukashenka's accusations of Ukraine of unwillingness to cooperate on this issue, and the extradition of the detainees to Russia caused a negative response at the level of the Office of the President of Ukraine. The negative effect of the incident was later mitigated by a media scandal with the version about the disrupted operation of the Security Council of Ukraine aimed to lure the militants to Ukraine. Journalists accused Zelensky's office of the failed operation.

As for the negative political signals and developments, most of them notably occurred in mid- and late August and were caused by brutality against street protesters. On the one hand, Ukrainian politicians and media noted the animation of Belarusian society and commented on the course of the election campaign, but there were no official negative assessments of the events until August 2020. Moreover, given the Russia factor, the Ukrainian media were rather cautious about the "new opposition" as well as because of their statements on Ukraine: about the war in Donbas and the ownership of Crimea. On the other hand, there were attempts to use processes in Belarus in the domestic political struggle in Ukraine. For example, since there is no "friends with Belarus" parliamentary group yet and its establishment is permanently delayed, some MPs created the group "For Democratic Belarus". On behalf of this association demands are addressed to the Foreign Ministry and the Office of the President seeking to get them to take a harsher position on Belarus.

The election day of August 9 and subsequent attempts to disperse the protesters by force caused a sharp response of the Ukrainian authorities.

On August 13, the Ukrainian Embassy sent a note to the Belarusian Foreign Ministry requesting information about the whereabouts of Ukrainian citizens detained in Minsk. On the same evening, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry officially did not recommend citizens of their country to visit Belarus. The following day the minister said that it was not worth exploring the possibility of Zelensky's visit to Belarus at the time.

On August 17, a closed meeting on the Belarus issue was held at the Office of the President of Ukraine, and it was decided on the same day to recall the ambassador for consultations. On August 22, Zelensky told Euronews that if he were in Lukashenka's place, "he would have held a repeat election". This was followed by an extremely harsh comment from the Belarusian Foreign Ministry

A logical continuation of the crisis was Lukashenka's statement about the "diplomatic slaughter" around Belarus and the statement by the Ukrainian foreign minister that contacts with official representatives of the Belarusian authorities "have been put on hold".

Protests in Belarus became the central topic for the Ukrainian media. On the one hand, solidarity with the Belarusian people was expressed and violence was condemned. However, the tonality of the discussion can hardly benefit Lukashenka's opponents. The reason is the unclear position on the creation of a political entity and the absence of a position (or the pro-Russia position) on the matters that are sensitive for Ukraine: cooperation with Russia, annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. Therefore, even if protesters and the authorities are considered individually, the information background created in the Ukrainian media can benefit neither.

Economy

Despite the negative political signals, economic cooperation between the two countries continued and gained momentum. Specifically, two-way trade revived. After the failure of the first quarter (-23% year-on-year), mutual trade rebounded in April–June, improving the six-month indicator to -14.9% from the same period in 2019. Ukraine has significantly increased deliveries of fish and fish products to the Belarusian market. Belarus retained its position in the top-10 importers of Ukrainian produce, but significantly reduced grain purchases. At the same time, supplies of Belarusian produce went up by 130%.

In the fuel market, Belneftekhim is beginning to regain some of its lost positions. In terms of gasoline, Belneftekhim managed to boost its sales to the level reported in the first half of 2019. As for diesel fuel, the market share has decreased to 23.2% (from 33%). On the other hand, Belarusian producers entered the Ukrainian bitumen market. For example, Šakutin's Oil Bitumen Plant doubled its shipments to the Ukrainian market. Active road construction (the Big Construction state program) contributes to the trend.

Export of electricity from Ukraine to Belarus was resumed. Operations are managed by a subsidiary of Naftogaz of Ukraine, which can be viewed as Belarus's main partner in energy deals.

Finally, Ukrtransnafta continues to supply Azerbaijani crude via the Odessa-Brody pipeline. Overall shipments have totaled more than 400,000 tonnes.

On the other hand, as we predicted in the previous issues of Barometer, attempts by Ukrainian lobbyists to shut the market to Belarusian goods and services using political mechanisms have persisted.

The level of economic cooperation can therefore still be evaluated as positive. However, political instability may create a framework where it will be impossible to speak not only about the promotion of trade and cooperation, but also about keeping them at the previously attained levels.

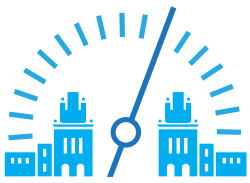
Forecast

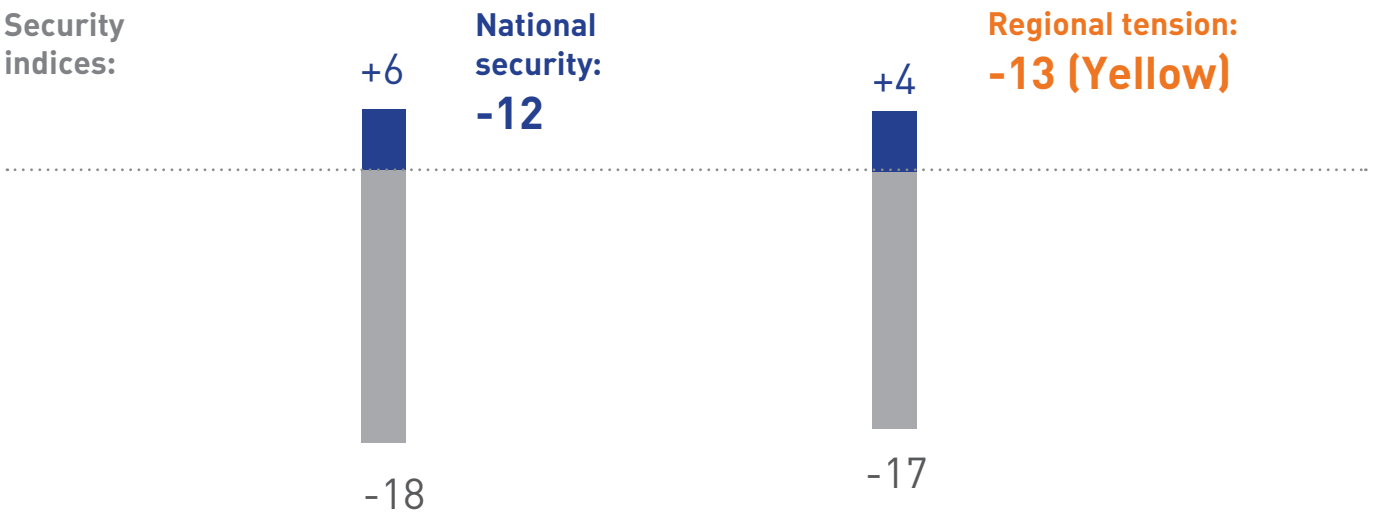
In the next two or three months, the political crisis in Belarus will remain the key factor affecting the relations between the two countries. Amid the fierce confrontation and close monitoring by the Ukrainian media of ongoing processes, the Ukrainian authorities cannot afford to engage in any negotiations seeking a deeper cooperation. Belarus, faced with harsh rhetoric and the commencement of a diplomatic conflict, will hardly take practical steps towards political de-escalation of the situation. The format of further work with "turning the page" will only become a possibility if the format of the political crisis in the country changes.

Further extension of the confrontation in Belarus threatens to deepen the political conflict and, if this happens, by October 2020 the crisis will affect the economy as well.

Should the Belarusian crisis be reformatted into a dialogue on the transit of power in the country, it is possible that the level of political relations will be resorted rather quickly (within a month or two). However, major cooperation projects will be postponed until the contours of a new system of power in Belarus have been outlined. With these processes going on, some Ukrainian manufacturers and importers from third countries will be using political rationale and lobbying to oust Belarusian products from the market.

Security Barometer: status of national and regional security





Trends

1. The election securitization and internal confrontation processes in the country have resulted in a situation when security agencies began to play a uniquely crucial role in political processes, which had never happened before, whereas the national security status that can be identified as a crisis.

2. Although the central government pinned much hope on its own capabilities to ensure security, domestic post-election processes forced it to appeal to Russia, asking for reinforcements should the situation get out of control, and, probably, to this end, to begin risky military stunts at the border shared with NATO member states.

3. Regional security around Belarus has been severely undermined. The situation in the east of Ukraine has somewhat improved, whereas the number and the scope of military exercises conducted by all countries of the region, first of all Russia, has increased.

1. National security

Overall status of national security

Election securitization. Minsk mobilized all security forces in an unprecedented manner, including, for the first time in history, the army to counter post-election protests. In his speech made on July 16 in Viciebsk, Secretary of State Andrej Raŭkoŭ said that the involvement of the armed forces to ensure internal security agrees with the new military doctrine of 2018.

In the face of mass protests after the election, the government opted to use the army as a political force, citing external interference. Lukashenka demanded on August 15 that the 103rd brigade be redeployed to Hrodna in response to the "tension at the western border," which was done. Addressing the Security Council on August 18, Lukashenka confessed the involvement of *"some units, particularly special operations forces ... in the pacification of the country."*

The government did not impose martial law and only use a portion of the 38th brigade in the streets of Brest right after the election, although other security forces apparently had too much work. That was probably done because the authorities were not completely sure that the army was loyal enough and willing to fight after former Commander of the 38th brigade Valier Sachaščyk and several dozen veterans of the brigade joined protesters on August 16.

Defense Minister Viktar Chrienin said on August 23 that the army was not going to let oppositionists approach the Great Patriotic War memorials, and several hundred servicemen were seen guarding the Minsk Hero City Obelisk.

Russia's interference

Thirty-three Russian nationals, who were said to be mercenaries of the so-called "Wagner Private Military Company" presumably patronized by Yevgeny Prigozhin, were detained near Minsk on July 29 shortly before the election. At the meeting with heads of security agencies on August 6, Lukashenka spoke about "provocateurs" that had been planning on disrupting the election. *"We do not know what they are capable of. We do not even know who they are. We need to be ready for any dirty tricks from all sides,"* he said.

Two Tu-134AK VIP jets of the Russian Aerospace Forces flew to Belarus on August 12 at the peak of the post-election protests. The detained PMC soldiers were released on August 14 without any special conditions. The presidents of Belarus and Russia had two telephone conversations on August 15 and 16. Putin, among other things, promised assistance in case of external military threats. A Tu-214VPU aircraft of the Russian FSB flew to Minsk on August 18. It is believed that it is used by the FSB director. Putin held a meeting with the Russian Security Council on August 21. The situation in Belarus was among the issues on the agenda.

In the interview published on August 27, President Putin said that a reserve of Russian law enforcement officers was formed at Lukashenka's request to help Belarus. Putin made a point, though, that there was no need to involve the units yet.

Equipment and training of the national army

Exercises. An operational-tactical exercise of the air force and air defense took place on August 4-7 at the Ružany training ground. The program included combat aircraft landing on a highway, take-off and an air strike on ground targets.

Tank, infantry and rocket battalions took part in an exercise in the Hrodna Region at the Astraviec, Hoža and Nieman training grounds on August 17-20 near the Lithuanian border.

On August 17, Lithuanian Defense Minister Raimundas Karoblis accused Belarus of fomenting tension by holding unscheduled exercises. *"Nevertheless, we do not see a military threat from Belarus today. Although those exercises are unscheduled, they include standard, regular procedures,"* he said.

At the August 19 session of the Security Council, Lukashenka instructed to enhance border control to prevent the penetration of "militants, weapons, ammunition or money intended to finance riots." He instructed the Defense Ministry "to closely monitor the deployment of NATO troops in Poland and Lithuania." Defense Minister Chrienin ordered to reinforce the Western Operational Command with Tochka and Polonaise missile battalions, a UAV squadron and air defense, electronic reconnaissance and electronic warfare means. A battalion tactical exercise was held on August 19-20 at the Hoža training ground. The 103rd brigade and border guards practiced reinforcement of border sections near Hrodna. A comprehensive tactical exercise took place on August 20-22 in the Hrodna Region to rehearse defense operations.

On August 21, President Lukashenka accused the United States and the European Union of the organization of protests in Belarus and the military force buildup near the country's borders. He claimed that attempts were made to tear off the Hrodna Region from Belarus, and that was the reason why he had to move large military forces to the region.

The Belarusian air force shot down Lithuanian balloons that carried propaganda leaflets on August 23 in the Ašmiany District. Lithuania reported an intrusion into its airspace.

The third phase of a comprehensive check of the combat readiness of the armed forces began on August 24. Several units, including a tank battalion of the 11th infantry brigade, were put on red alert. Around 140 servicemen were called from the reserve.

A tactical exercise with a reinforced infantry battalion of the 19th infantry brigade took place on August 26-28 at the Barysaŭ training ground.

A comprehensive tactical exercise was held in the Hrodna Region on August 28-31. The military practiced defense operations near the state border under the supervision of Commander of the Western Operational Command Viktar Hulievič. He said that the exercise was conducted *"not only in the territory of the Hoža training ground, but also on an unfamiliar field and forested terrain."* A combined force grouping (airborne, infantry, tank, artillery, UAV and electronic warfare units) was formed for the exercise.

Equipment. As reported on July 12, a Belarusian design company was testing the updated 9M114MB anti-tank missile. It became known on August 24 that Belarus entered into contracts with Russian manufacturers for the supply of two BTR-82A battalion sets and the first batch of four Mi-35M helicopters. Belarus also plans to cooperate with Almaz-Antey Air and Space Defense Corporation for the supply of air defense systems.

International security contacts

State Military Industrial Committee Chairman Zmicier Pantus held online talks with President of Defense Industries of Turkey Ismail Demir on July 17.

It is noteworthy that the Defense Ministry communicated with foreign defense attachés quite frequently in August, probably, seeking to somehow smooth out the negative consequences of the political turmoil.

2. Regional Security

Overall situation in the region

Strategic stability. In late July, Vienna hosted negotiations between Russian and American interdepartmental ad hoc groups on strategic stability. Analysts said that in terms of the ranks of the officials involved and the duration of the consultations, the event brought to mind sessions of the groups of the Medvedev-Obama bilateral presidential commission of the Moscow-Washington relationship reboot period.

War in the east of Ukraine. The warring parties took additional ceasefire enforcement measures in eastern Ukraine on July 27. Until the end of the period under review, the full ceasefire was generally respected by both parties.

Exercises and confidence building measures in the region

Progress. Over the period under review, 22 relatively large exercises conducted by Russia and 13 by other countries combined were identified in the region. This information is incomplete, since there is no comparative data on Poland and the Baltic States. The increase in the number of maneuvers is seasonal and is associated with political decisions as well. In general, the scope of the exercises of the Russian army is expanding. As many as 14,600 tonnes of missiles and ammunition were shot during combat training sessions in the Western Military District as of late July 2020, a 4% increase year-on-year (16,300 tonnes in 2019, up 8% from 2018).

Of particular note is the unscheduled inspection of the troops of the Southern and Western Military Districts of Russia announced by the Russian president on July 17. The inspection program included 56 tactical exercises that involved 149,755 personnel and 26,820 hardware units.

A bilateral exercise of the Baltic Fleet and the 6th combined-arms army of the Western Military District of Russia was held on August 24-31 in the Kaliningrad and Leningrad Regions (6,000 personnel and around 1,500 hardware units) against the backdrop of maneuvers in Belarus. Some Russian experts believed that "the exercises in Belarus and Russia were interrelated", and so was the command and staff exercise of the Operational Command North and the Joint Force Command of the armed forces of Ukraine in late August, reportedly, as part of preparation for a strategic command exercise.

Regional forces buildup

NATO. The redeployment of American troops on the continent was the most important event. On August 15, the United States and Poland signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. One thousand American servicemen will reinforce 4,500 American personnel already stationed in Poland. It is planned to expand local infrastructure to accommodate 20,000 American troops in the country.

Amid the discussions of the partial withdrawal of American troops from Germany, Latvian Defense Minister Artis Pabriks said on July 9 that his country was ready "for investments allowing the accommodation of a certain number of American troops in Latvia."

The decision of the Latvian army to stop sending the National Guard to protect the border shared with Belarus and Russia from July 9 was out of line with the general trend towards the militarization of the region. This has been done since March 30 as part of COVID-19 response measures.

Relatively little happened in the area of arms procurement. On July 6, the U.S. government approved the sale of six UH-60 Black Hawks to Lithuania. The Lithuanian army received an unspecified number of Javelin antitank missiles worth USD 31 million on August 5.

Ukraine. The rehabilitation of 15 military airfields in Ukraine, including the ones near the Belarusian border (Vasilkiv near Kyiv) was reported in July.

Russia. Russia is developing military infrastructure along the Belarusian border. The 24/7 construction of two multifunctional military medical centers began in the Pskov Region in early July. The Russian Defense Ministry said in August that "the pace of housing construction in the Voronezh, Belgorod, Kursk, Bryansk and Smolensk Regions was one of the fastest in the Central Black Earth Economic Region over the past 5 years." A large part of the housing is intended for army officers.

Forecast

The political crisis in Belarus has become a factor that shapes the regional security agenda alongside the conflict in East Ukraine. Furthermore, the country will be dragged into the confrontation between Russia and the West much deeper before long, which Minsk has been managing to avoid for quite a while.

Neither the securitization of domestic political processes in Belarus, nor the involvement of the army and other security agencies in these processes, nor the deteriorated relationships with the neighboring states and vulnerability to a possible Russian intervention, which has grown immensely, can be overcome in the coming months even in part, unless unforeseen external factors alter the situation.

The cumulative repercussion of the recent developments may soon lead to a pivotal restructuring of the entire architecture of Belarus's national security and a steep increase in the role of Russia in it.

The Kremlin makes efforts to relieve tension associated with its increased role in Belarus and, accordingly, in the regional strategic layout by improving its relationship with NATO.

Appendix 1

Catalogue of events underlying the relations development indices

Relationship with Russia

Date	Event	Score
1 July	Siamaška on compensation for the tax maneuver	-1
2 July	Lukashenka congratulates Putin on the vote	+1
3 July	Gref visits Minsk	+2
3 July	Peskov on the meeting near Rzhev and voting on amendments	+1
14 July	Haloŭčanka signs agreements on the nuclear power plant and oil	+1
16 July	Arrest of accounts of the wife of the deputy minister of finance of Russia	-1
17 July	Mishustin's visit	-2
22 July	Mishustin's speech at the Duma on integration prospects	-1
24 July	Russian Foreign Ministry on the EU's intervention in Belarus	-1
29 July	Detention of Wagner mercenaries	+1
30 July	Chief of the Security Council on search for 170 fighters and bases in Pskov	+1
31 July	Security Council of Russia on the situation in Belarus	-1
31 July	Reinforcement of the border regime	+2
1 August	Investigation into Belarusian fabrics	+1
4 August	Russian Central Election Commission won't send observers	+1
4 August	Russian Foreign Ministry on the detention of Wagner fighters	+2
5 August	Decrease in oil supplies in August	-1
5 August	Medvedev on Belarus, Union State and violence	-2
6 August	Lukashenka on the union with Russia: people are 'overripe'	+1
7 August	Putin and Lukashenka talk about the detention of 33 Russians	-2
8 August	Security Council of Russia on the situation in Belarus	-1
10 August	Putin congratulates Lukashenka	+1
10 August	Zakharova on the arrests of Russian journalists	+2
12 August	Putin and Macron on Belarus	+1
13 August	Zakharova: Minsk is under unprecedented pressure	+1

Date	Event	Score
14 August	Wagner fighters are sent to Russia	-1
15 August	Nexta is put on the criminal wanted list in Russia	-2
15 August	Lukashenka: Putin will help by sending troops	-1
16 August	Lukashenka and Putin talk on the phone again	-1
16 August	Russian media 'troops' at Belarusian television	+1
18 August	Putin, Merkel, Macron on Belarus	+1
19 August	Peskov and Lavrov defend Lukashenka	-1
21 August	Peskov on willingness to act as a mediator and foreign intervention	+2
21 August	Security Council of Russia on the situation in Belarus	+1
23 August	Lavrov will accept any decision by Lukashenka	+1
24 August	Lukashenka and Putin talk on the phone	+2
25 August	Lavrov and Biegun on Belarus	-1
26 August	Gazprom on Belarusian gas debts	-2
27 August	Putin: we are ready to help Lukashenka by sending internal troops	+1
28 August	Putin: Belarusian election is valid	-2
29 August	Putin: Russia recognizes the legitimacy of the Belarusian election	-1
29 August	Withdrawal of Russian journalists' accreditation	-2
31 August	Peskov: situation in Belarus under control	+1
Total		**+12**

Relationship with the EU

Date	Event	Score
1 July	Makiej participates in a multilateral videoconference meeting with European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi	+1
2 July	Deputy Energy Minister Zakreŭski meets with EBRD Head of Belarus Marina Petrov	+1
6 July	Lukashenka meets with the Ambassador of Slovakia Jozef Migaš	+1
8 July	Online meeting "Belarus-Lithuania: Trade and Economic Cooperation after the Pandemic" attended by Vice-Minister of the Economy and Innovation of Lithuania Jekaterina Rojaka and Deputy Minister of Economy of Belarus Jaraševič	+1
9 July	Makiej meets with Latvian Ambassador Einars Semanis	+1
9 July	Makiej meets with the Ambassador of Slovakia Jozef Migaš	+1
10 July	Lukashenka approves a EUR 259 mln loan agreement with the EBRD for the construction of bridges and reconstruction of the M-3 highway	+1
14 July	Negative comment by a spokesman for the Belarusian Foreign Ministry on the statement of the head of the EU Delegation to Belarus	-1
23-24 July	Kraŭčanka visits Brussels; an extraordinary Belarus-EU coordination meeting; meetings with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights Eamon Gilmore and Secretary General of the European External Action Service Helga Schmid	+2
24 July	Makiej visits Latvia (Silene), negotiations with Minister for Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs	+2
27 July	Minister of Housing and Utilities Andrej Chmel meets with Head of the EU Delegation Dirk Schuebel; agreements are signed on the EU's additional funding to improve water quality in seven Belarusian cities	+1
29 July	A videoconference meeting is held between Minister of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade Katlovič and President of the Hungarian Competition Authority Balázs Rigó	+1
31 July	Makiej has a telephone conversation with Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz	+1
4 August	Makiej has a telephone conversation with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Linas Linkevičius	+1
11 August	A special statement of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry with sharp criticism of the position of European capitals with regard to the presidential election and the post-election situation	-2
12 August	Makiej has a telephone conversation with Latvian Minister for Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs	+1
18 August	Makiej has a telephone conversation with the Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs Pekka Haavisto	+1
18 August	Makiej has a telephone conversation with Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden Ann Linde	+1
19 August	Makiej has a telephone conversation with Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain Arancha González Laya	+1

Date	Event	Score
20 August	Makiej has a telephone conversation with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia Urmas Reinsalu	+1
24 August	A note of protest is handed over to Lithuanian Ambassador to Belarus Andrius Pulokas in connection with the incident on the state border	-2
25 August	Makiej has a telephone conversation with Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy Luigi Di Maio	+1
27 August	Strong protest declared to Charge d'Affaires a.i. of Poland Marcin Wojciechowski	-2
31 August	Negative comment by the spokesman for the Belarusian Foreign Ministry regarding the visa sanctions imposed on Belarusian officials by the Baltic States	-1
July-August	Numerous negative materials in the official media and statements by the country's leadership against the EU; direct accusations against individual EU member states of interference in the internal affairs of Belarus and attempts of military influence; threats of retaliatory sanctions	-5
August	Lukashenka's refusal to communicate with European leaders	-3
Total		**+5**

Relationship with China

Date	Event	Score
16 July	Opening of the Belarus–China Friendship Center at the Minsk Region Institute of Education Development	+1
22 July	Belarusian State Technological University signs an agreement on the training of technical specialists with Yunfu Technical College and Guangdong Union for International Scientific and Technical Cooperation with CIS Countries	+1
4 August	Lukashenka's positive statements on cooperation with China in his annual message to the parliament and the people of Belarus	+1
10 August	Telegram from Xi Jinping with congratulations to Lukashenka on winning the presidential election in Belarus	+2
10 August	Lukashenka visits the site of the project of the Belarusian National Biotechnology Corporation	+1
14 August	Ministry of Agriculture and Food of Belarus signs an agreement on agro cooperation as part of the project of an industrial international cooperation park in the Caofeidian bonded area, Hebei province	+1
Total		**+7**

Relationship with the U.S.

Date	Event	Score
4 July	Lukashenka's congratulations on Independence Day of the USA. Statement that building strong relations with the United States is one of the main objectives of Belarusian foreign policy	+1
10 July	Companies from the U.S. became residents of the HTP	+1
16 July	Belarus purchases a second batch of American oil	+1
16 July	The U.S. expresses concern about the detention of activists in Belarus	-1
28 July	Kraučanka meets with the new U.S. Charge d'Affaires ad interim Giauque	+1
30 July	Giauque's positive statement about the prospects of Belarus–U.S. cooperation	+1
5 August	Positive statements by Julie Fischer regarding cooperation with Belarus and support for sovereignty and independence	+1
7 August	Vitali Shkliarov is indicted	-1
11 August	Pompeo's statement that the presidential election was neither free nor fair	-1
13 August	Pompeo's statement on the possibility of discontinuing oil supplies to Belarus	-1
17 August	Trump's statement about "terrible" situation in Belarus	-1
19 August, 21 August	Lukashenka accuses West of planning and financing "street protests and riots"	-2
25-27 August	Discussion of the Belarus situation with Russia and Ukraine by representatives of the U.S. Department of State	-1
28-29 August	Critical statements by the U.S. Embassy about the situation in the country	-1
Late August	U.S. is considering sanctions	-1
Total		**-4**

Relationship with Ukraine

Date	Event	Score
1 July	Establishment of the group "For Democratic Belarus" in the Rada	-1
1 July	Ukraine increases export of fish and fish products to Belarus	+1
3 July	Meeting of the steering committee of the Forum of the Regions	+1
3 July	Sokal's interview to Interfax-Ukraine	+1
7 July	Kizim's interview to the magazine Belarus	+1
7 July	Supply of BelAZ trucks to the central mining and processing plant	+1
8 July	General Nayev's statement that there are no threats from Belarus	+1
8 July	Humanitarian aid to Ukraine	+1
9 July	Statement by the ambassador of Ukraine on the strategy for the development of cooperation between regions	+1
10 July	Conversation between Yermak and Siarhijenka	+1
22 July	Minister of economy of Ukraine speaks about misalignments in trade	-1
21 July	Belarus shuts its market to pork from Ukraine	-1
21 July	Restored simplified border-crossing procedure for wild herb, mushroom, berry harvesting	+1
20 July	Ukrainian engineering troops receive MAZ, Kovalska Plant buys a new batch of equipment	+1
22 July	Resumed electricity imports from Ukraine	+1
27 July	Acting minister of energy of Ukraine speaks against energy imports from Belarus	-1
30 July	Detention of Wagner fighters, summoning of the Ukrainian ambassador	+1
30 July	Ukraine and Belarus strengthen border control	+1
31 July	Phone conversation between Kuleba and Makiej	+1
31 July	Belarusian ambassador meets with deputy foreign minister of Ukraine	+1
31 July	The Council of Ministers of Belarus agrees to sign a protocol on information exchange between border guards of the two countries	+1
30 July	Oil Bitumen Plant doubled export to Ukraine	+1
31 July	MAZ controls 25% share of Ukraine's truck market	+1
31 July	Belneftekhim restores sales volumes	+1
1 August	Belarus is in Ukrainian COVID-19 "green list"	+1
1 August	Kuleba invites Makiej to attend a Lublin Triangle meeting	+1
5 August	Ukraine's Cabinet approves draft documents to liberalize road transport between the two countries	+1
5 August	Exports of Belarusian agricultural produce double	+1
5 August	Sokal meets with Reznikov	+1

Date	Event	Score
5 August	Phone conversation between Zelensky and Lukashenka	+1
6 August	Lukashenka's interview to Gordon	+1
10 August	Ukrtransnafta reports on oil transit through Odessa-Brody	+1
10 August	Simplified Border-crossing procedure (for herb, mushroom and berry picking) suspended	-1
11 August, 24 August	Kuleba discusses the situation in Belarus with Maas	-1
11 August	Meeting of the minister of agriculture of Belarus with the minister of economy of Ukraine (Agro 2020)	+1
13 August	Search for Ukrainians detained in Belarus – embassy's notes, ombudsman's statement	-1
13 August	Zelensky demands the release of Ukrainians	-1
13 August	Recommendation of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry not to visit Belarus	-1
14 August	Zelensky's statement following the release of Ukrainians	-1
14 August	Foreign Ministry of Ukraine: Zelensky's visit should not be discussed	-1
14 August	Lukashenka accuses Ukrainians of organizing riots in Belarus	-1
15 August	Official comment of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry concerning Lukashenka's accusations	-1
15 August	Zelensky's comment on the extradition of the Wagner mercenaries	-1
16 August	Ukrainian Foreign Ministry's statement on the Belarusian election	-1
16 August	Initiative of the Ukrainian delegation in PACE	-1
17 August	Zelensky's closed meeting on Belarus	-1
17 August	Recall of the Ukrainian ambassador for consultations	-1
18 August	New manufacturing of trolleybuses from Belarusian kits	+1
20 August	Meeting at the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine	-1
22 August	Zelensky on new elections	-1
23 August	Rebuke of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry	-1
24 August	Commentary of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry	-1
24 August	Lukashenka congratulates Zelensky on Independence Day	+1
27 August	Kuleba and Biegun talk about Belarus	-1
27 August	Lukashenka: diplomatic massacre	-1
28 August	Kuleba: relations between Belarus and Ukraine on hold	-1
28 August	Belarusian Foreign Ministry's comments about "on hold"	-1
28 August	Kuleba on the Russian intervention	+1
30 August	Restoration of trade turnover between Belarus and Ukraine	+1
30 August	Overall negative media background in Belarus and Ukraine throughout August	-1
31 August	Protests outside the Belarusian Embassy	-1
Total		**+5**

Appendix 2

Catalogue of events underlying the security indices

Date	Event	National security	Regional tension
July-August	War in the East of Ukraine	+2	+2
July-August	13 exercises of Ukraine and NATO	-1	-1
July-August	22 exercises of Russia	-2	-2
July-August	Securitization of the election in Belarus	-3	-2
6 July	Approval of the sale of Black Hawk helicopters to Lithuania by the U.S. government	-1	-1
9 July	Discontinued involvement of Latvia's National Guard in the protection of the border with Belarus	+1	+1
July	Restoration of the military airfield infrastructure by Ukraine	-1	-1
July	Development of Russia's military infrastructure along the Belarusian border	-1	-1
4-7 August	Operational-tactical exercise of the air force and air defense of Belarus	+1	-
5 August	Supply of Javelin antitank guided missiles to the Lithuanian army	-1	-
August	Involvement of the Belarusian army in the domestic political confrontation	-1	-
14, 18, 24 August	Meeting of International Military Cooperation Department leadership with foreign defense attachés	+1	+1
15 August	Russia's security assistance to Belarus	-2	-2
15 August	Signing of the U.S.-Poland Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement	-1	-1
17 August	Redeployment of the 103rd brigade to Hrodna	-1	-2
17-27 August	Series of tactical exercises in the Hrodna Region	-2	-2
24 August	Signing of the contracts for the supply of the BTR-82A and Mi-35M to the Belarusian army	-	-1
26-28 August	Tactical exercise with an infantry battalion of the 19th infantry Brigade at the Barysaŭ training ground	+1	-
28-31 August	Comprehensive tactical exercise of the Belarusian army near the state border in the Hrodna Region	-1	-1
Total		**-12**	**-13 (Orange)**

Appendix 3

Colour scale of regional security tensions

Colour Value	Numerical Value	Interpretation
White	higher than -1	Low likelihood of escalation. Non-threatening situation
Green	from -2 to -6	Presence of military activities, which do not pose a direct threat and will not necessarily lead to the escalation of tensions. Such a situation calls for cautious attention.
Yellow	from -7 to -12	Military and other activity is observed that is capable of leading to the escalation of tensions. The situation calls for close attention.
Orange	from -13 to -17	Military preparations in the region. Growing tensions. Situation is threatening.
Red	-18 and lower	Sharp escalation of tensions. The conflict is virtually unavoidable. A pre-war situation.

Authors

Sergey Bogdan, political expert, analyst at the Ostrogorski Centre. He received his doctoral degree from Freie Universität Berlin. Research interests: Belarus's external policy and military security.

Valeria Kostyugova, political commentator and adviser, head of Agency of Policy Expertise (Vilnius, Lithuania), editor of the expert community website Nashe Mnenie (Our Opinion). Research interests: Belarus-Russia relationship, Belarusian political parties and political organizations.

Olga Kulai, China researcher, MA in Asian Studies from Belarusian State University. Research interests: China foreign and home policy, Chinese overseas investment.

Dzianis Melyantsou, political analyst, expert in international relations, coordinator of Foreign Policy of Belarus programme, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations. He specializes in Belarus's foreign policy, as well as national and international security.

Yauheni Preiherman, political analyst, expert in international relations, Director of the Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations. Main research interests: foreign policy of small nations, international relations in Eastern Europe, Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security.

Igor Tyshkevich, expert of the International and Internal Policy program at the Ukrainian Institute for the Future.

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