№ 18 (November and December 2020)

MINSK BAROMETER

Monitoring of foreign policy and regional security

Dear readers!

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We are glad to present the eighteenth issue of the Minsk Barometer, which assesses the foreign policy and security situation in Belarus in the months of November and December 2020.

Russia continues to support Belarus amid the country's isolation by the West, whereas Belarus moderates its claims to union privileges from Russia.

The crisis in Belarus's relationship with the **European Union** continues to unfold as Brussels imposes sanctions and Minsk responds with counter-sanctions. The relations are particularly tense with Poland and Lithuania.

The diplomatic track of Belarus's engagement with **China** revived, which is a result of the appointment of heads of diplomatic missions by both countries. Belarus and China continued their mutual political support.

Harsh public rhetoric persists in Belarus's relationship with the **United States**. Washington is building up its sanctions pressure, but so far those measures do not affect Minsk's vital economic interests. The return of the U.S. ambassador progressed and is now in its final stage.

Political engagement with **Ukraine** grew weaker. In November and December, there were no official relations not only at the top level, but also at the level of bilateral operational arrangements.

In the **security** sphere, the Belarusian government noticeably strengthened its control over the situation in the country; however, it was largely at the expense of extraordinary measures and unprecedented concessions to the Kremlin. The level of military activity in the region decreased insignificantly, but neither the pandemic nor the economic recession had potential to put an end to the "creeping" build-up of forces and armaments amid poorer transparency.

Yours respectfully,

Dzianis Melyantsou,

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

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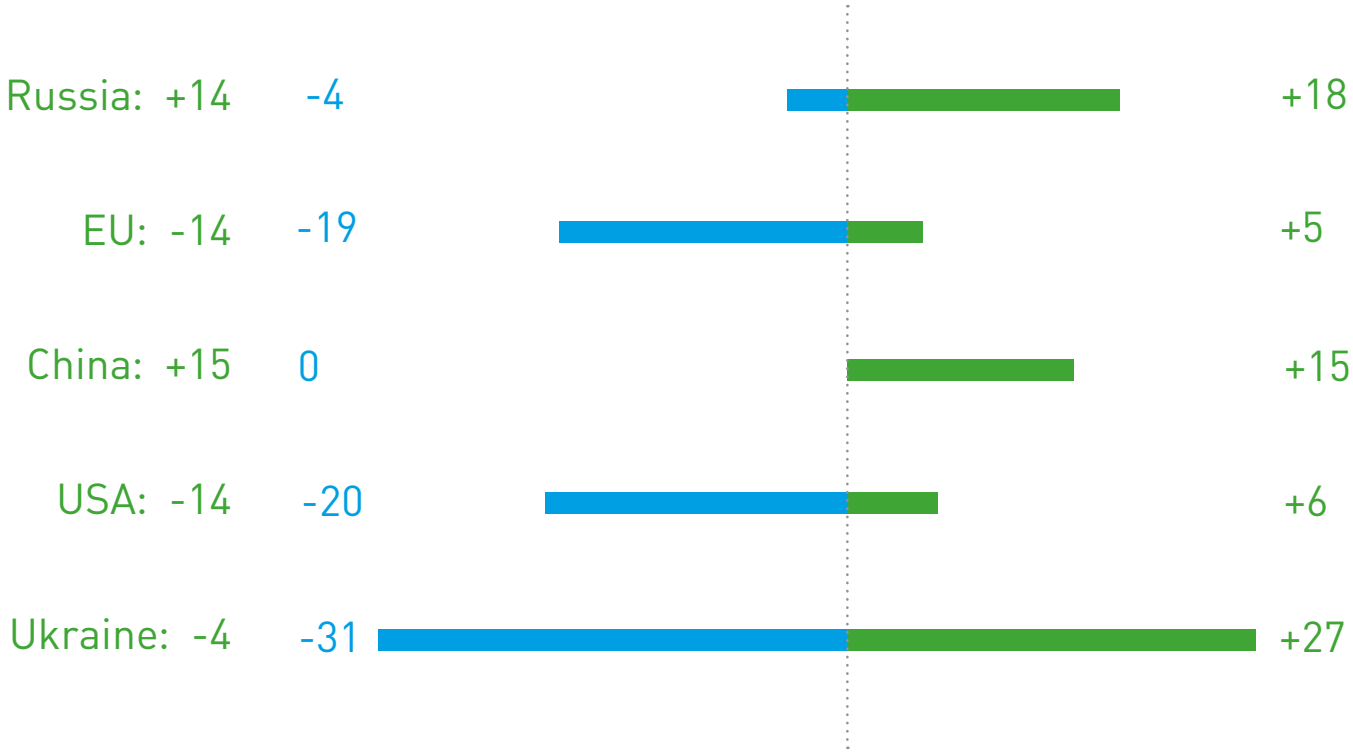
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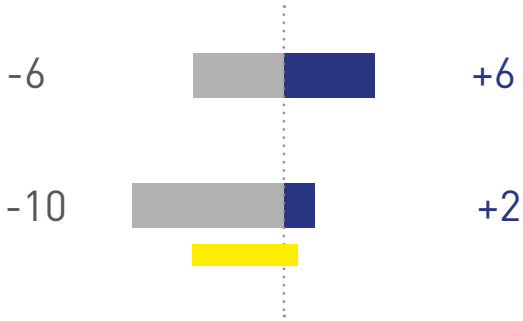
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Relations development indices:



Security:

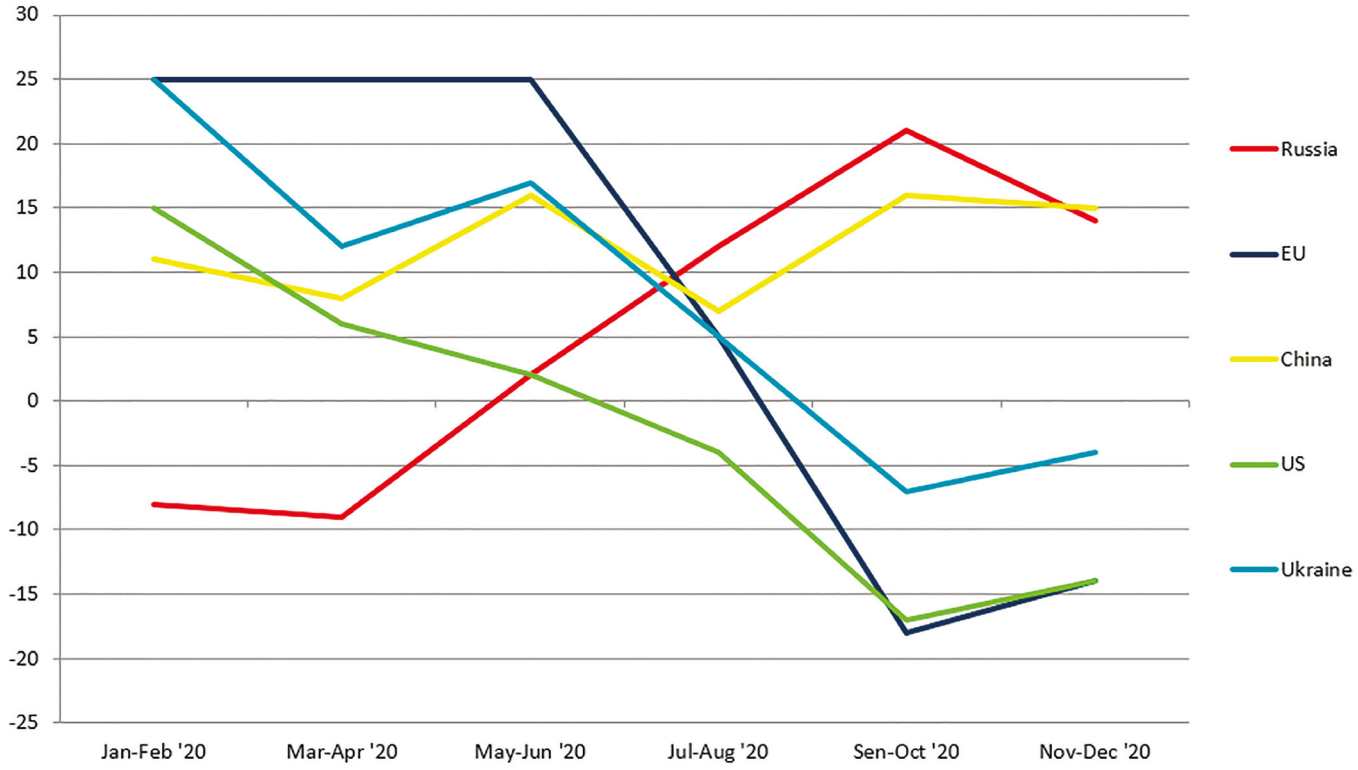


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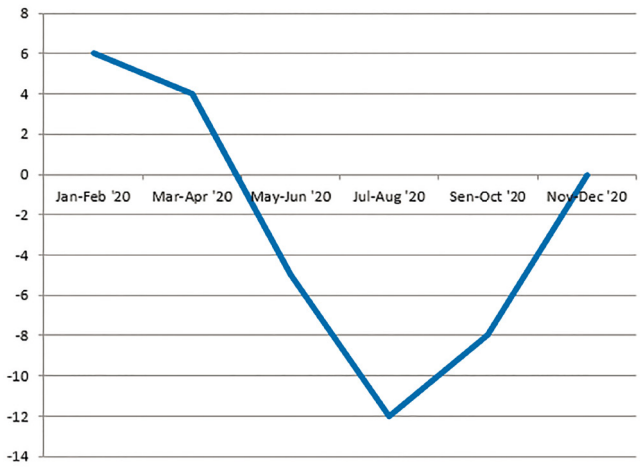
Level of regional tension: -8
(yellow level)

The yellow level implies that military and other activity is observed that is capable of leading to the escalation of tensions. The situation calls for close attention.

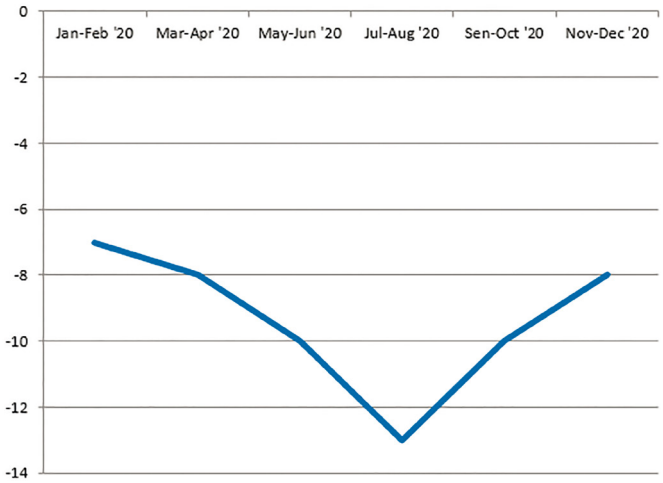
Dynamics of foreign policy indices



National security



Level of regional tension



Relationship with Russia



Aggregate index: +14
Positive points: +18
Negative points: -4

Trends

1. Russia continues to support Belarus in its endeavor to cut itself off from the European Union and the United States.

2. Belarus moderates its claims to union privileges provided by Russia.

3. The gap between Minsk's and Moscow's positions on the resolution of the internal political crisis in Belarus is not getting narrower.

Developments and processes

Political agenda

The political background of the Belarus–Russia relationship over the last two months of the year was predictably cold – there were few newsworthy developments because of the COVID-19 restrictions and, apparently, some mutual discontent of the two countries. More importantly, however, Belarus managed to avoid a conflict with the Russian leadership over energy supplies by substantially gearing down its ambition.

The bilateral political agenda was determined by the difference in the approaches of Minsk and Moscow to the resolution of the Belarusian political crisis, and the gap never became any narrower in November or December. Moscow believes that the Belarusian leadership has no other foreign policy support to rely on, and therefore Minsk will be forced to comply with any of its conditions. Minsk, for its part, thinks that by supporting it, the Kremlin is actually saving itself.

Representatives of the Kremlin and Vladimir Putin in the first place will be reluctant to further expand the already long list of issues by lending official Minsk their support. Therefore, they believe a peaceful handover of power without democratization of the political system would serve the interests of Russian elites. It is for this reason that throughout November and December, Belarus's constitutional reform was in the focus of Russia's narrative on its ally. Also in November and December, Belarus concluded its presidency in the EEU and the CSTO.

Constitutional reform

The anticipated constitutional reform was fleshed out by Lavrov, Peskov and other Russian officials, who kept adding details to it during November and December; however, none were confirmed by the Belarusian side. Russia offered a quite clear outline of the substance of upcoming amendments to the Belarusian constitution, period for the transfer of power, and mechanisms for its implementation. Changes envisage decentralization of state

administration, timeframe for making changes spans the period until the spring of 2021, whereas implementation will be achieved through a nationwide referendum and subsequent election, which is expected to be held by the end of the year. Since the Belarusian side provided no public confirmation of those plans, and each new statement made by official Minsk disproved the previous one, observers had a feeling that the constitutional reform must have been initiated by the Kremlin, rather than Minsk, despite the fact that in the course of the only meeting between Lukashenka and Putin during the political crisis, the Russian leader said that a representative of Belarus had allegedly voiced the proposal at an OSCE meeting.

It is not known whether the Kremlin really insists on having Belarus put in place a political reform, but unless the Belarusian authorities consider such a reform advisable and practical (judging by their actions, they obviously do not), then the Kremlin has no tools to enforce it.

Crude oil, natural gas, nuclear power plant and loan

During the last week of the year, Belarus received the first USD 500 million installment of the loan from the Russian government in pursuance of Putin's promises in Sochi on September 14. The second installment is projected to be transferred in 2021. The Belarusian budget for the year 2021 was notably approved with a deficit of more than USD 1.2 billion.

On December 24, Belarus and Russia signed an agreement on natural gas supplies for the year 2021. Neither the price, nor the volume of deliveries was disclosed, but Prime Minister Raman Haloŭčanka maintained that the terms of supplies were almost the same as in 2020. Notice that back in 2019, the price for the year 2020 caused repeated conflicts between Belarus and Russia. Minsk had long been seeking discounted natural gas rates.

Haloŭčanka also claims that crude oil supply contracts for 2021 were signed with most Russian suppliers on last year's terms, but without the inter-budgetary compensation for the premium that Belarus pays Russian suppliers as markup applied to the Russian crude price. No agreement on compensation for deliveries of contaminated crude in 2019 was achieved. It seems Belarus remains the only affected country that has never received any compensation.

Also importantly, judging by Haloŭčanka's words, in 2021, just as in 2020, there will be no general agreement with Russia on crude supplies, and Belarus needs to negotiate with each individual supplier. The Russian government has withdrawn from regulating Belarus's business relationships in that area. This implies that the conflict with Russia over crude oil resulted in not only immediate price hikes for Belarus, but also long-term costs.

Notwithstanding that the terms of the gas and oil agreements are far from what Belarus originally wanted, the agreements signed on the basis of reduced benefits of collaboration with Russia should be regarded as a constructive step. Under the circumstances, while Russia remains one of the few countries that support Belarus and the importance of Belarus as an export transiter of Russian energy resources is not as vital as it used to be, making the agreements entirely on Russia's terms looks like a manifestation of common sense.

On November 3, the first unit of the Belarusian nuclear power plant was connected to the national power grid. So far, no clear plans have been made for the use of electricity generated by the nuclear plant, withdrawal of other generating facilities, or reduction in natural gas purchases.

CSTO, EEU and Union State

At the end of the year, Belarus transferred its presidency in the CSTO and the EEU at the concluding videoconferences. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and political crisis, Belarus failed to make full use of its presidency to promote its agenda in these organizations. At the same time, Russia's internal challenges – sanctions, COVID-19, volatility of energy prices, as well as constitutional reform and political tensions – markedly affected Russia's motivation to actively engage in activities within the framework of the CSTO and EEU. The developments in

Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Nagorno-Karabakh proved that Russia was unwilling to pay money, supply weapons, provide trade preferences, or share its political reputation or any other tangible resources to fully retain its influence along its perimeter. Moscow would obviously like to continue shaping policies in Belarus and across the other allied countries, but it believes that the post-Soviet countries are more interested in this than Russia is.

Media policy

During November and December, not only independent Russian media, which enthusiastically supported Belarusian protests from the very start, but also talk-shows featured on central governmental television channels were quite critical of excessive violence used by Belarusian security forces against protesters. In general, the Russian media and social networks are increasingly critical of Lukashenka; police brutality is largely condemned by public opinion – even by those who do not share protesters' aspirations.

Forecast

The tonality of the Belarus–Russia relationship in recent months – the cool detachment and complete lack of attention to each other's statements and words – suggests that this trend will continue over the next two months. The two countries will most likely keep talking about different things, without responding to each other's needs, but at the same time making assurances of friendship and alliance. The preservation of lockdown measures will contribute to this: the format of videoconferences and telephone calls is not conducive to animated discussions.

However, it is unlikely that this non-conflict environment will last long – Belarus is in great need of money, and even in the COVID-19-caused online format, financial concerns should be on the rise.

Relationship with the European Union

Aggregate index: -14
Positive points: +5
Negative points: -19



Trends

1. New turns of the downward crisis spiral in the relationship between Belarus and the EU were observed as Brussels imposed sanctions and Minsk adopted counter-sanctions.

2. Belarus's relations remained particularly tense with Poland and Lithuania.

3. At the same time, the progress and scale of escalation are still lower than those observed after the presidential election of December 2010.

Developments and processes

The months of November and December of 2020 saw the crisis – which stemmed from the Belarusian presidential campaign of the summer of 2020 and quickly disrupted the positive agenda that had been formed in previous years – continued to unfold. As expected, most of the developments logged during the period under review were associated primarily with the unwinding spiral of the EU's sanctions and reciprocal counter-sanctions imposed by Belarus.

On November 6, the Council of the European Union approved the second package of restrictive measures against official Minsk: fifteen persons were added to the original list of Belarusian citizens, against whom the EU applies individual sanctions, which brought the total number to 59. All of them are subject to a ban on entry into the EU, as well as freezing of assets, if any, in the jurisdiction of the EU countries. Further, citizens and companies in the EU are prohibited from making any financial resources available to them. The second package turned out to be quite special, as it added Aliaksandr Lukashenka to the list of those subject to the restrictive measures, who was not involved in the first round of the sanctions, which the EU treated as a kind of invitation to negotiate with the opposition, mediated either by the EU or the OSCE. However, Lukashenka expectedly showed no interest in such proposals.

On November 17, a large foreign policy meeting was held at the Palace of Independence, where, among other things, decisions were taken concerning Minsk's response to the second package of restrictions imposed by the EU. The decisions did not come as a surprise, as the Belarusian authorities had previously announced that sanctions would be adopted should the EU expand its lists. Minsk therefore announced that it:

- "made additions to its list of sanctions in a mirror-like fashion" with respect to each of the EU member states (and also, traditionally, "in compliance with diplomatic correctness"

did not disclose the names of the citizens of the EU member states on the list), whose representatives are denied entry not only to Belarus, but also to the entire territory of the Union State of Belarus and Russia;

• downgraded its involvement in the Eastern Partnership initiative to the expert level: Belarus will be represented at EaP events by government experts, rather than by heads of ministries, while the country's permanent representative to the EU will attend summits;

• suspended the EU-Belarus coordination group and the human rights dialogue "until the EU decides to change the policy of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank, which at this stage have decided to freeze their cooperation programs with Belarus.

As he commented on the results of the meeting, Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makiej said that Minsk would not like to see further escalation of its relations with the EU, because "we would like to have reliable transit through these countries" and "we are interested in diversifying supplies, both import and export, through these countries." At the same time, he said that the meeting addressed Minsk's possible response to a situation if "our partners should decide to tighten these sanctions – to go from personal to economic sanctions, which some of the Belarusian opponents of the authorities are seeking now."

The foreign minister and some other officials elaborated on these measures after the Council of the European Union had approved the third package of its restrictive measures on December 17. The package included 36 new items: high-ranking officials, "economic actors, prominent businessmen and companies benefiting from and/or supporting the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka." As before, Brussels stressed that the purpose of the sanctions was "pressure on the Belarusian political leadership to prevent further violence and repression, to release all political prisoners and other unjustly detained people, and to initiate a genuine and inclusive national dialogue with broader society."

In response, Minsk announced further expansion of its own personalized list of the EU officials, to whom restrictions apply, and its intention to take "a number of legal actions in response to the absolutely ungrounded inclusion of a number of enterprises and persons in the EU's list." According to Makiej, "a decision has been made to restrict the activities of a number of political foundations in the Republic of Belarus, as well as to review the implementation of a number of so-called humanitarian, educational and cultural programs that engage respective political institutions in Belarus, including those operating under the auspices of foreign embassies." He also pointed to the fact that the Belarusian authorities were considering at least three more areas for response, where "very sensitive and serious" retaliatory measures could be taken.

Therefore, both the rhetoric and acts taken by official Minsk in response to the restrictive measures imposed by the EU indicate that the Belarusian authorities have an obvious political determination to respond to each new restrictive decision by Brussels. Because of economic limitations, Minsk can only deliver "counterblows" in three areas:

1. To introduce and expand its own list of persons that are denied entry into Belarus and the entire Union State;

2. To limit/rule out any possibility for the EU countries and institutions to work within the framework of political and humanitarian projects inside Belarus (i.e. a "blow" on the EU's political and humanitarian interests inside Belarus);

3. To limit/cease engagement with the EU countries with respect to cross-border security issues.

Including the EU officials in its own list is the simplest and least painful retaliation, which has been applied since the first round of European sanctions in line with the reciprocity principle. As the arsenal of the EU's sanctions expands, Minsk starts exploring ways to infringe on the EU's interests in Belarus itself. This applies not only to the conditions for engagement with European political foundations and NGOs, as well as the implementation of educational

and cultural programs under the auspices of the embassies of the EU states, but also the conditions for the operation of Belarusian NGOs and the media funded by the EU. In this context, supporters of a socio-political "purge" in the Belarusian administration make use of the EU's sanctions to substantiate a tougher line towards Belarusian civil society.

Finally, as the most radical last resort measure (in Minsk, they do hope it will never be used), possibilities for limiting or even suspending collaboration on the most sensitive issues of cross-border security are being explored. This might concern *inter alia* illegal migration, drug and arms trafficking, and international crime. It is more likely, though, that Minsk's response in this "last resort" category will affect cooperation in peaceful nuclear uses.

A recent example is the incident that occurred in the second half of December, when a visit of a team of experts from the European Commission and the European Nuclear Safety Regulatory Group (ENSREG) to the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant was cancelled at the last moment. The visit had been viewed by both Minsk and Brussels as a particularly important one and even as a confidence-building measure amid the diplomatic crisis, but each side ended up blaming the other one for frustrating it. The EU accused the Belarusian authorities of denying comprehensive cooperation and, in particular, their unwillingness to enable experts to visit the site of the nuclear power plant. Minsk, on the other hand, claimed that it ensured that European experts had everything they required for the visit and efficient work. The Ministry of Energy of Belarus emphasized that it was ready to maintain transparency and continue its cooperation with its European colleagues, despite the incident.

The meeting of the leadership of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry with ambassadors of the EU member states on December 9 became another notable event. Attention was immediately drawn to the very fact that such a meeting was held amid spiraling sanctions and counter-sanctions, and in that context, the event could be regarded as a clearly positive development and an attempt to maintain normal channels of communication. However, in the end, it was a mini-scandal that the media focused on: following the meeting, the EU Delegation published a press release, which evoked a sharp negative reaction of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry. Minister Makiej said that the document failed to reflect the tone and substance of the meeting and also emphasized that "premature presentation of the substance of the discussion often damages possibly positive undertakings and may have an opposite effect altogether."

Against the overall conflict-ridden backdrop of Belarus's relationship with the EU, Minsk's relations with Warsaw and Vilnius, which appear to have taken the most active positions on the Belarus case of all the EU member states, remain especially strained. The ambassadors of those countries (as well as the Belarusian ambassadors to those countries) have not yet returned from their respective capitals. Initially, all of the sides had hoped that the ambassadors would return before the end of 2020, but as new sanctions were imposed, there was no such possibility. Moreover, during the period under review, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry twice summoned Charge d'Affaires of Poland to Belarus Marcin Wojciechowski. The Belarusian side invoked the need for Poland to implement bilateral agreements on combating crime, as well as the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. According to official Minsk, the said documents apply to the activities of Belarusian journalists who are located in the territory of Poland and implicated in the Telegram channels HEXTA and HEXTA Live. On November 16, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry called on Warsaw to extradite them to Minsk.

As we predicted in the previous issue of the Barometer, the political conflict between Belarus and Lithuania evolved into an economic contention during the period under review. BNK (UK) Limited, a subsidiary of Belarusian Oil Company, temporarily suspended deliveries via the seaport of Klaipeda. The decision resulted from Lukashenka's demand that transit cooperation with Lithuania should be ceased in response to Vilnius's stance on political developments in Belarus and envisaged subsequent elaboration of alternative transit routes via Russian seaports.

According to Belstat, in January-November 2020, two-way trade between Belarus and the European Union amounted to USD 10.577 billion (down by 11.7% from January-November 2019). Belarusian exports reached USD 4.779 billion, a drop by 14.7% from the first eleven months of 2019. Imports from the EU countries amounted to USD 5.799 billion (down by 9.1% year-on-year). Belarus reported a deficit of its trade with the European Union at USD 1.02 billion.

Forecast

Given the progress of the political confrontation in Belarus and fluctuating international agenda, the coming months may see the intensity of diplomatic conflict between Minsk and the EU spiral down. At least, unless some new event takes place in Belarus capable of serving as another trigger for domestic and foreign political escalation. Most European capitals took a wait-and-see attitude in the run-up to the All-Belarusian People's Assembly scheduled for February 11–12, which will show how exactly official Minsk is going to resolve the political crisis.

The All-Belarusian People's Assembly itself can hardly become a trigger for further unwinding of the sanctions–counter-sanctions spiral, despite the attempts by representatives of the opposition organizations in Warsaw and Vilnius to lobby for the inclusion of all of the delegates into the EU's list of restrictive measures. These attempts are backed only by a small portion of the EU states, while many European officials are repulsed and even irritated by them.

The previously mentioned new – already the fourth – package of sanctions, however, cannot be ruled out, although the likelihood of its adoption in the coming months is not high. Overall, the Belarus issue is going down on the list of foreign policy priorities of the European Union.

Relationship with China



Aggregate index: +15
Positive points: +15
Negative points: 0

Trends

1. Diplomatic activities were renewed as heads of diplomatic missions were appointed by both countries.

2. Minsk and Beijing continued their mutual political support.

Developments and processes

In November, the candidacy of Belarus's new ambassador to China was approved – the diplomatic mission will be led by Jury Sianko, the former chief of the State Customs Committee of Belarus. The new ambassador is expected to maintain the policy towards increasing two-way commodity turnover and Belarusian export supplies to China. Xie Xiaoyong, the previously appointed Chinese Ambassador to Belarus, arrived in Minsk in November and presented his credentials to President Lukashenka. The appointment of the two ambassadors kick started diplomatic activities. As soon as he presented his credentials, the new head of the Chinese diplomatic mission noted that China and Belarus "support each other on the key significant issues," had a series of meetings at the Belarusian Foreign Ministry and even met with Russian Ambassador to Belarus Dmitry Mezentsev. This, alongside the Chinese media trend towards covering developments in Belarus via Russian sources (the trend was identified in the July–August Barometer issue) implies that the Belarus–China relationship might be overshadowed by that between China and Russia.

Belarus and China continued offering each other political support. The Belarusian side repeatedly voiced its appreciation for cooperation with China. For example, President Lukashenka told a foreign policy meeting on November 17, 2020 that Russia and China were the two countries that "provided the most tangible assistance and support in this difficult time." In his interview to the Belarus 1 TV channel Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makiej referred to China as a strategic partner and a priority in terms of relationships. In December, Spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry of China Wang Wenbin was asked by a Chinese journalist about the sanctions imposed by individual countries and international organizations against Belarus following the presidential election. He reiterated the point about China's support for Belarus's efforts "to ensure its independence, sovereignty, security and development" and went on to say that China was "resolutely opposed to the split and turmoil in Belarusian society caused by external forces."

In December 2020, a meeting of the bilateral intergovernmental commission for cooperation was held, where the Belarusian side was represented by First Deputy Prime Minister Mikalaj Snapkoŭ, while the Chinese side was led by Guo Shengkun, a member of the Political Bureau

and secretary of the CPC Central Politics and Law Commission. The signing of a protocol to establish a subcommittee on cooperation in customs control and quarantine regulations, which is designed by the two states as a platform for removing obstacles to the access to the Chinese market, is an important result of the meeting, held as a videoconference. As a follow-up to the analysis of the previous meeting of the intergovernmental commission in October, the parties signed a joint statement of the Ministry of Economy of Belarus and Ministry of Commerce of China on the commencement of negotiations over the agreement on trade in services and investments. According to BelTA news service, the meeting addressed, among others, the use of "the balance of Chinese credit lines in the amount of USD 4 billion to finance specific projects aimed at developing the social and transport infrastructure in order to sustainably improve the living standards of the Belarusian population," which attests to the ongoing active search for funding by the Belarusian side.

Also during the period under review, Minsk and Beijing did not manage to fully restore direct flights, which were repeatedly interrupted by the Civil Aviation Administration of China after each regular flight from Minsk, because COVID-19 cases were reported among arriving passengers. Direct flights were suspended a significant number of times throughout 2020 at the initiative of the Chinese side, which significantly affected bilateral mobility and, consequently, the implementation of bilateral projects in Belarus.

In mid-December, the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange held the first specialized trade session to sell Belarusian lumber to China. The results of the session were not announced; however, given the measures to simplify registration procedures, the number of Chinese companies accredited at the BUCE notably more than doubled in 2020 from 13 to 28.

Great Stone

During the period under review, two companies were registered as residents of the CBIP:

- Solidpipe System LLC (Republic of Belarus), production and application of innovative protective coatings on components for mining industry equipment;
- Xinwei-Velozavod (MSK) LLC, production of electric bicycles.

In November and December, the CBIP signed agreements and memorandums of cooperation with various organizations, city administrations, companies from China, Belarus and Russia (National Intellectual Property Center, National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, etc.), organized talks with the Silk Road Fund and other financial and banking organizations.

In late December, Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration of Belarus Zmicier Kruty and the Chinese ambassador to Belarus unveiled the Sino-Belarusian center for cooperation in science and technology, which was built with China's technical and economic assistance. The parties noted that announced investments had totaled USD 1.2 billion by the end of 2020, with 68 residents (at the end of 2019, there were 60) from 14 countries. Kruty referred to the results of the CBIP's operation in 2020 as "quite impressive": USD 75 million in exports, USD 300 million in disbursed investments, about a thousand new jobs, an average wage of BYN 2,500 (about USD 970).

In an extensive interview with BELTA notably entitled "Will Chinese business continue to invest in Belarus?" Director General of Great Stone Industrial Park Development Company Yan Gang spoke about the interim performance of the Park and announced the key priorities for 2021, which include the development of a feasibility study for the second CBIP development phase. China is projected to continue providing technical and economic assistance funds for this purpose. No significant CBIP projects did without this assistance in 2020, and funding never ceased to be a relevant issue.

In November, the Council of Ministers of Belarus approved the restructuring of the loan from the Export-Import Bank of China for the construction of the engineering and transport infrastructure of the start-up area of the park (USD 170 million) – the period for the disbursement of the loan, originally raised against the security of the Belarusian

government, was extended for the second time, this time until 2021, whereas maturity remains unchanged.

Forecast

Belarus expects its exports to China to increase, with a change in the structure of its export portfolio, in 2020. Trade and economic ties, compliance with export targets and expansion of the export product line will continue to serve as priorities for the Belarusian side within the framework of bilateral relations in 2021.

The unstable epidemiological situation will result in continued lockdown measures on the Chinese side, which will affect communication and mobility between Belarus and China. The pace of cooperation will also rely on the economic situation both in the world and in Belarus. Given the global trend towards the reduction in funding from China's "political" banks (China Development Bank and Exim Bank of China) and increase in the share of commercial lending, Belarusian officials will find it increasingly more difficult to negotiate new credit lines from traditional Chinese lending banks. In addition, when looking at prospects of bilateral relations in the medium- and long-term, one should keep in mind regional political and economic trends, as well as the development of Sino-American relations after the inauguration of the new U.S. president.

Relationship with the U.S.



Aggregate index: -14
Positive points: +6
Negative points: -20

Trends

1. Harsh tone remains in mutual public rhetoric.
2. The U.S. is building up its sanctions pressure, but does not yet affect Belarus's vital economic interests.
3. The process of the U.S. ambassador's return to Belarus is in its final stage.

Events and developments

Rhetoric

During the monitored period, the bilateral conflict continued to unfold, as both sides were busy hurling public accusations at each other. Washington accused the Belarusian authorities of numerous human rights violations, whereas Minsk accused the U.S. of interference in its internal affairs and pressure. The situation in Belarus was in the focus of a number of statements by Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, members of the Department of State and the U.S. Embassy in Minsk.

Chronologically, the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism report on Belarus became the first reason for Pompeo to make a statement. On November 6, he said that the report detailed the "sustained abuses committed during the fraudulent August 9 election" and called for putting an end to violence against peaceful protesters.

George Kent, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, said in a telephonic press briefing on the same day that the U.S. would use various programs to increase support and assistance to Belarusians who have been forced to flee abroad. When asked whom the U.S. currently considered to be the legitimate leader of Belarus, the spokesman for the Department of State said that the United States does not consider the election process on August 9 to have been free or fair: "The falsified results that were announced several days later cannot convey legitimacy on anyone, and therefore it is difficult for us to consider anyone claiming victory out of those August 9 processes to be legitimately newly elected as leader of the country."

He went on to say that Washington "continues to call for dialogue between Belarusians."

On November 11, Secretary of State Pompeo spoke about the expulsion of two British diplomats from Belarus, which had happened the day before. He called it "arbitrary and unjustified" and "yet another attempt to distract from the ongoing repression of peaceful protesters."

On the following day, November 12, Pompeo made a special statement condemning the continued detention of political prisoners in Belarus. As the U.S. Secretary of State said, political prisoners were subject to "harsh and life-threatening detention conditions, including credible reports of torture." According to the statement, the United States stands with those who remain detained and unaccounted for, those who have been killed, and those who continue to peacefully assert their right to choose their leaders in free and fair elections. In addition, Pompeo called on the Belarusian authorities to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Coordination Council and Belarusian civil society.

The U.S. Secretary of State addressed the Belarus issue again on December 23, stating that the United States "continues to support international efforts to independently investigate electoral irregularities in Belarus, the human rights abuses surrounding the election, and the crackdown that has followed," and stands with "the brave people of Belarus and supports their right to free and fair elections."

On December 4, Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun said as he spoke at the OSCE Ministerial Council Plenary Session that the Belarusian authorities must release political prisoners, journalists, and all those unjustly detained. In his words, since August, the OSCE commitments have been broken and human rights brutally violated in Belarus; and the widespread violations and abuses documented in the Moscow Mechanism report continue. He also urged Minsk to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Coordination Council and Belarusian civil society.

The U.S. Embassy in Minsk also issued statements (on November 14, 17 and 26), triggered by the death of Raman Bandarenka, tense political situation in the country and initiatives of the Belarusian authorities concerning local and foreign media.

The Belarusian authorities also resorted to harsh rhetoric with respect to the U.S., but it was mostly reactive and not systematic. For example, on November 27, Aliaksandr Lukashenka said that the U.S. and the West were interested in the Belarusian crisis, which could "undermine Russia's position," i.e. it was "a historic chance to put an end to the Russian influence."

Previously, on November 7, he called the presidential election in the U.S. "a disgrace and a mockery of democracy." At the same time, Lukashenka pointed out that he expected no changes in the Belarus–U.S. relations, whatever the outcome of the election in the U.S.: "Neither the previous one, if he should leave, nor the new one, if he should come, will show our country on the map. Americans, you know, are busy with their problems."

Washington's additional restrictive measures and the adoption of an updated Belarus Democracy Act evoked a negative response from official Minsk. For example, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry announced the preparation of retaliatory measures and noted that "the 'dictatorship of human rights' imposed by the Americans looks especially inappropriate against the backdrop of the human rights situation in the U.S., which is far from being normal."

For its part, the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus referred to the adoption of the Belarus Democracy Act a threat to international peace and security.

Sanctions

During the reporting period, the U.S. continued to extend its restrictive measures against Belarus. On December 23, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on Deputy Minister of the Interior and Chief of the Criminal Police Hiennadz Kazakievič, the Central Election Commission, OMON riot police of Minsk City Executive Committee and the Minsk Internal Affairs Directorate as a whole, as well as on the KGB Alpha unit.

OFAC's designations imply that all property and interests in property of the persons on the list that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons are blocked. In addition, any entities that are owned, directly or indirectly, 50 percent or more by one or more blocked persons are also blocked. Unless authorized by a general or specific license issued by OFAC, or otherwise exempt, OFAC's regulations generally prohibit all transactions by U.S. persons or within (or transiting) the United States that involve any property or interests in property of designated or otherwise blocked persons. The prohibitions include the making of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services by, to, or for the benefit of any blocked person or the receipt of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services from any such person.

In addition, the Department of State imposed visa restrictions on 39 individuals who, in its opinion, were involved in electoral fraud of August 9 and subsequent, brutal crackdown. In total, by the end of December, the U.S. Treasury Department had sanctioned 25 individuals and 13 entities, while 63 individuals "responsible for undermining Belarusian democracy" were subject to visa restrictions imposed by the Department of State.

It is notable that, unlike the European Union, the U.S. has so far refrained from extending sanctions to Belarusian companies and businesses. The previous restrictive measures against Belarusian companies (oil, chemistry, and others) remain "frozen."

On December 22, the upper house of the U.S. Congress (Senate) passed and on December 28, President Donald Trump enacted the updated Belarus Democracy Act. The bill "Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act" (abbreviated Belarus Democracy Act) was presented in the Senate by Congressman Christopher Smith. He is one of the authors of a similar document on Belarus, adopted in 2004 and updated in 2006 and 2011.

Based on the document, the U.S. president will be enabled to impose personal visa sanctions against members of the Central Election Commission and those who "assisted in the manipulation of the presidential election," against "every government official responsible for the crackdown on independent media" as well as anyone involved in human rights abuses and repression. The summary of the bill specifies that such measures may affect citizens of any state, including Russia. Among other things, the document contains a provision recognizing the Coordinating Council as a legitimate institution to participate in dialogue on the peaceful transfer of power.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry called these acts by Washington emotional and stated that the counter measures of the Belarusian side had already been prepared and would be put in place. However, the same statement reads that Belarus "has always taken as a premise the importance of maintaining normal, mutually beneficial relations with the United States, based on equality and mutual respect."

Return of the Ambassadors

Despite strained bilateral relations and the election of Biden as president, the United States has not suspended the ambassador exchange process. On December 15, the U.S. Senate approved the candidacy of Julie Fischer as head of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Belarus. On December 24, she was sworn in as ambassador.

On the following day, December 25, Deputy Foreign Minister of Belarus Alieh Kraŭčanka, who was appointed ambassador of Belarus to the United States in July 2020, but continued to perform his duties at the Foreign Ministry and supervised, ***inter alia***, Belarus's relationship with the U.S., died suddenly in Minsk. This loss will undoubtedly produce a negative impact on diplomatic communication between Minsk and Washington, given Kraŭčanka's experience and scope of personal contacts with U.S. diplomats and officials at various levels, as well as in the expert community.

COVID-19 and other areas of cooperation

On November 16, HTP director Usievalad Jančeŭski met with U.S. Chargé d'affaires Jeffrey Giauque at the High-Tech Park. According to the official report, they addressed "a broad range of Belarus–U.S. cooperation issues in IT and high technologies." Giauque said that the U.S. supported the active promotion of the Park and the expansion of the U.S. foothold in the HTP. At the same time, "a favorable business environment and stable legal regulation are crucial for American business in Belarus and are critical factors for future investment and expansion of cooperation." As of the end of 2020, more than 70 companies with U.S. capital were registered in the Park. In the first nine months of 2020, the Park's companies' export to the U.S. amounted to USD 816 million.

On December 7, the country office of the World Health Organization in Belarus with the financial support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supplied thermal imagers and COVID-19 protection gear to Minsk Airport. The equipment worth USD 47,000 was purchased as part of the project Supporting WHO COVID-19 Preparedness and Response. According to Michail Valačko, head of the airport logistics service, the new equipment will significantly strengthen the airport's capacity to not only contain the pandemic, but also promote air services in these conditions.

Forecast

The developments observed during the final two months of the year suggest that neither Minsk nor Washington is in a hurry to ultimately eliminate the achievements of previous normalization. The new U.S. president, Joseph Biden, will hardly radically change his policy on Belarus, which is viewed in the context of its confrontation with Russia, despite his rather tough statements concerning the Belarusian administration during the election campaign. Hence the cautious steps aimed at outlining the stance of official Washington, but not at provoking further strengthening of Russian influence in Belarus.

In the coming months, additional expansion of the list of restrictive measures is possible, but without the inclusion of enterprises that are sensitive to the Belarusian economy. The U.S. ambassador is likely to arrive in Minsk to present her credentials to President Lukashenka.

Relationship with Ukraine



Aggregate index: -4
Positive points: +27
Negative points: -31

Trends

1. Political engagement between the two countries shrank amid expectations of the EU's decision to extend its restrictive measures against Belarus.

2. In November and December, there were no official relations between Belarus and Ukraine not only at the top level, but also at the level of bilateral working mechanisms.

3. The year was marked by a decline in the economic characteristics of cooperation, which Ukraine attributed mainly to "objective reasons" and, above all, the pandemic. In December, a precedent was set as Ukraine took a decision to not expand economic cooperation pursuant to the EU's sanctions: the National Bank of Ukraine refused to authorize the sale of a controlling stake in BTA Bank to Belarusian businessman Mikalaj Varabiej effectively putting an end to the purchase approval procedure during its final phase.

Events and developments

Politics

The two months of November and December 2020 were marked by weaker political contacts amid the imposition of the EU's sanctions against Belarus. Ukraine, obliged to comply with the priorities of the EU's foreign policy in accordance with the Association Agreement, was carefully studying both the communication and decisions that the EU made with regard to Belarus, while assessing the risks it will have to incur in the economic segment of its engagement with Belarus. By the end of 2020, official relations between the two countries had been virtually non-existent, as Ihor Kizim, Ukraine's ambassador to Belarus, regretfully stated in an interview with the Belarusian portal Smartpress on December 29.

On November 20, Ukraine joined the EU's individual restrictive measures against a number of Belarusian officials, which was followed by a swordplay between the Foreign Ministries: Uladzimir Makiej called Ukraine's decision "a mockery of common sense" and announced a draft package of countermeasures that had already been worked out and was ready to come into effect, while Dmytro Kuleba spoke about non-interference in Belarus's internal affairs and the expected decision of Belarus to impose counter-sanctions. Soon after that, the Ukrainian ambassador to Belarus received a note of protest in connection with the series of "anti-Belarusian acts" near the Belarusian embassy in Kyiv and the security deficit of the diplomatic mission, which the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry called "excessively emotional and groundless." The very next day Lukashenka used official media to publicize excerpts from the secret services' data concerning Kuleba's negotiations with the Polish

Foreign Ministry, allegedly addressing plans to "smother Belarus", which was denied by Kuleba on the same day.

Almost two weeks later, Kuleba made a statement about the inadvisability of imposing economic restrictions on Belarus. He did not rule out, though, that sanctions could be applied in the future. That statement put an end to official public communication between the two Foreign Ministries in 2020.

The contradictory votes by Belarus and Ukraine at the UN General Assembly were left without any commentary or media coverage in both countries:

1) On December 7, Belarus voted against the strengthened resolution of the UN General Assembly on Russian militarization of Crimea (the resolution was initiated by Ukraine);

Belarus joins Russia's vote on the basis of its CSTO commitments, unless this contradicts its national interests. Ukraine, on the other hand, is working to strengthen its negotiating position in talks with Russia over the situation in Donbas and establishes instruments of additional pressure on Russia in the international scene.

2) Ukraine voted against and Belarus in favor of the UN General Assembly's resolution on the condemnation of the glorification of Nazism, originally proposed by Russia.

Ukraine previously passed a decommunization law condemning Stalinism, so it cannot vote in favor of resolutions condemning exclusively Nazism, rather than Nazism and Stalinism. The Belarusian authorities treat the Soviet period of the country's history as the foundation of the state ideologeme and therefore refrain from participating in the West's initiatives to condemn Stalinism; on the contrary, it supports undertakings to condemn Nazism.

The voting decisions by both countries are motivated by geopolitical and ideological considerations underlying Ukrainian and Belarusian foreign policies.

Amid the increasingly cold spell in the relationship, the Belarusian state border and security measures were being strengthened. In November and December, border control was almost entirely established over 100 kilometers across scarcely passable terrain of the radiation environmental reserves and river sections on the border with Ukraine: frontier posts Chojniki, Dziaražyčy, and Almany were unveiled; a border monitoring and remote control center was created (a project supported by the U.S. Department of Energy envisaging cooperation in the prevention of illicit traffic of nuclear materials and other radioactive substances); a modular-type border outpost was commissioned with rapid redeployment functionality; the Hrodna regional customs received additional video documenting facilities and digital radio stations under the EU's Poland–Belarus–Ukraine technical assistance project.

In parallel with this, on November 1, Belarus introduced temporary restrictions on entry from Ukraine through land crossing points and later banned exit from the territory of Belarus, not only for Belarusian citizens, but also for foreigners with temporary or permanent Belarusian residence permits. Although the restrictions were imposed due to the complicated epidemiological situation, which is why the Belarusian media made regular reports about the growing number of COVID-19 cases in Ukraine, such restrictions also helped law enforcers to obtain additional information about Belarusian and foreign citizens, whose international travel can be politically motivated. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, for its part, regulated the situation with Ukrainian citizens entering the territory of Belarus to receive medical treatment, and also simplified the procedure for Belarusians to stay in Ukraine: the 90-days-per-year limitation of stay was temporarily canceled, which legally resolved the issue of Belarusian "refugees" in Ukraine, and furthermore conditions for receiving residence permits were simplified for highly qualified Belarusians, which channeled competent migrants, who were dissatisfied with the political situation, towards Kyiv.

At the end of the year, the office of the Honorary Consulate of Belarus in Lviv suspended its operation, and the consular office of the Ukrainian Embassy in Belarus partially suspended reception of citizens.

In such conditions the Embassies of both countries had to make urgent efforts to reanimate economic cooperation at least at the level of enterprises, organizations and existing programs in both countries. As a result of the joint efforts of the ambassadors and the chambers of commerce and industry of both countries, an online meeting of the Belarus–Ukraine advisory cooperation council was held, and measures were proposed to mitigate the consequences of the business slump. Agreements were signed by enterprises and between regional chambers of commerce, as well as universities – although they were declarative rather than practical. The ambassadors also held individual consultations with directors of enterprises.

The unofficial visit of Verkhovna Rada MP Yevhen Shevchenko, a member of the ruling Servant of the People party, became the only personal contact at the political level. While officially on vacation, he had a number of meetings with Belarusian officials, gave interviews complimenting the Belarusian authorities, and was reprimanded in absentia by faction leader Davyd Arakhamia, who made a public statement that the MP's opinion was a private judgment, since he was on vacation and had been making repeated "requests" to withdraw from the faction.

Nevertheless, the visit was probably underestimated and produced an overall positive effect. Soon after Shevchenko's visit, the Ukrainian media hailed the fact that an MP from the ruling party dared to officially criticize not only his party's policy, but also the president himself, which is an example of democracy and demonstrates a completely different state of political affairs, which by default is impossible in Belarus. This positive attitude of Ukrainian officials and the media to the trip may imply that the visit could have had official, yet unstated agenda.

The year was concluded with two seemingly unremarkable events that may nevertheless have long-term political implications:

1) On December 28, the National Bank of Ukraine cancelled the purchase of a controlling stake in the Ukrainian subsidiary of Kazakhstan's BTA Bank by Belarusian businessman Mikalaj Varabiej, despite the fact that the deal had almost been closed. The decision resulted from a lengthy process of approvals, which saw the Antitrust Committee of Ukraine approve the transaction on December 9, 2020; however, the EU's decision to include Varabiej in the list of individuals subject to restrictions forced the National Bank of Ukraine to veto the deal citing high political risks. The decision constituted the first known serious economic restriction imposed on cooperation between the two countries stemming from the EU's restrictive measures against Belarus.

2) On December 31, state-owned BelTA news agency reported that a long-term contract with Azerbaijan's SOCAR had been signed for crude deliveries to Belarus via the Odessa-Brody pipeline. That was Belarus's first long-term contract for crude supplies, which was signed with a country other than the Russian Federation. Belarus is working hard to diversify its oil supplies, and the contract may be economically beneficial if the transportation challenge is effectively addressed, as envisaged in the contract – via the Ukrainian section of the Druzhba pipeline. It is possible that the disrupted purchase of the controlling shareholding in BTA Bank will have a negative impact on the fulfillment of this contract as well, as the authorities had eyed the possibility of diversifying their financial risks and opportunities in the CIS in the context of the purchase of Kazakhstan's BTA Bank in Ukraine.

Both developments will affect Belarus's ability to maneuver in its relations with Russia over energy supplies and transit, as well as economic security of Belarus and the entire region.

The Ukrainian media continued to explore the issue of Wagner Group mercenaries; however, it was not raised in Belarus. The topic was predominantly addressed by the media associated with the fifth president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, as well as opinion leaders associated with the European Solidarity party. The scandal was presented in such a form that alleged the "responsibility" of Andriy Yermak, Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, for the failure of the SBU's top-secret operation and negligence in his relations with the Belarusian law-enforcement structures and personally Lukashenka, which resulted in the loss of important witnesses and alleged participants of the acts of Russian aggression in the territory of Ukraine.

The investigation is highly politicized. The Wagner scandal is probably a sort of pressure on President Zelensky seeking to have him dismiss Yermak and replace him in the Trilateral Contact Group for the peaceful settlement of the situation in eastern Ukraine. Yermak's opponents in Poroshenko's entourage are not satisfied with the pace of the peace talks, as no real progress had been observed during the entire tenure of the fifth president of Ukraine – it was achieved more recently through the efforts of the team led by the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine.

Economy

Media reports focusing on economic cooperation were limited to information about the poorer performance of trade in petrochemicals, liquefied gas, export of commodities and services, as well as sporadic deliveries under previous contracts and cooperation programs: Belneftekhim completed the construction of the ninth well at the Machukhskoe field; Amkodor and BelAZ delivered several vehicles; Mozyr Oil Refinery reduced its liquefied gas supplies, etc. Only one long-term contract for fuel supplies by BOC was reported.

The meeting of the Belarus–Ukraine advisory council for cooperation on November 11 became the only positive development during the period under review – several contracts for commodity supplies and agreements on cooperation between regional chambers of commerce and industry were signed. Anyway, the event was below the official state level.

Otherwise, economic cooperation was put on hold; the Ukrainian authorities took a pause to identify risks in connection with the EU's policy of sanctions on Belarus.

It was reported that JSC Belarusian Shipping Company was working to upgrade three river-sea-class vessels to transport cargoes from/to Ukraine, providing an additional cheap logistics route for commodities (and possibly oil) between the two countries after the opening of Ukrainian waters to third-country vessels earlier this year.

Crude oil trade and natural gas transit remain particularly important for economic cooperation between Belarus and Ukraine. In December 2020, Ukrtransnafta first sold Belarus a batch of Azerbaijani crude, and then, on New Year's Eve, Minsk was reported to have signed the first ever long-term contract for crude deliveries in the history of independent Belarus with a supplier that became an alternative to Russia – Azerbaijan's SOCAR, which is planning to deliver crude oil via the Odessa-Brody oil pipeline.

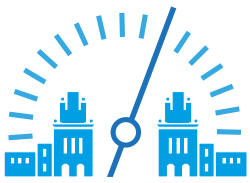
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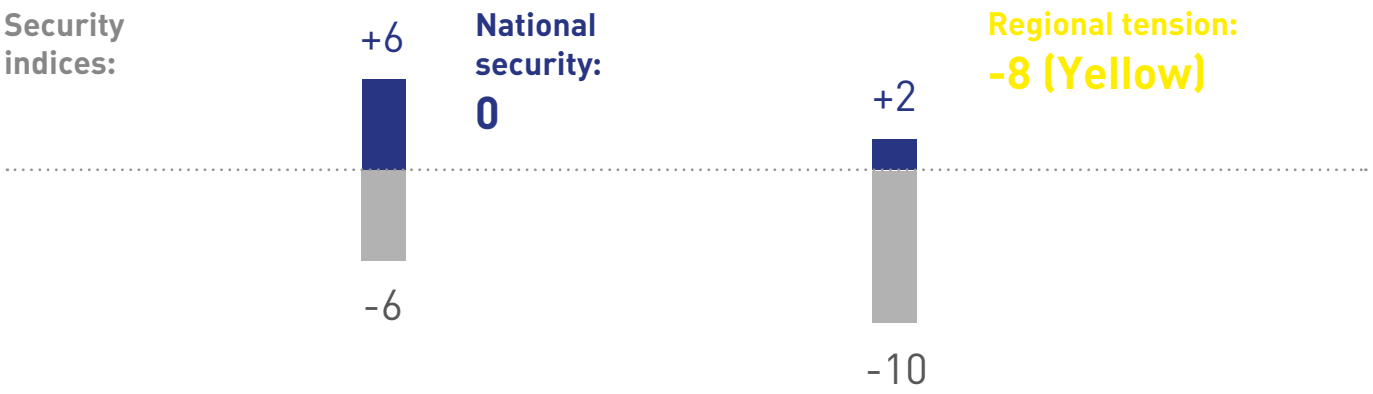
The EU's restrictions will inevitably affect the engagement between Ukraine and Belarus, where economic interests remain a traditional priority for both sides. Making new contracts in all areas of cooperation will be a complicated process that will require political consultations. In this environment, the absence of official relations at all levels is the most serious risk for both countries. They will be forced to resume consultations. At the same time, we should not expect that confidence between the top officials of the two countries will be restored any time soon. This factor will clearly affect the quality of other contacts.

On the whole, political turbulence will persist, and the Ukrainian media will continue criticizing Lukashenka. The impact of the political tension in the relationship will be reflected in the economic segment of cooperation.

Further escalation of the confrontation between the authorities and the protesters in Belarus may result in the application of economic sanctions against Belarus by Ukraine. At the same time, constitutional reform in Belarus and some form of transit of power might become a reason to alleviate the relationships between the EU, Ukraine, and Belarus.

Security Barometer: status of national and regional security





Trends

1. The Belarusian government has markedly tightened control of the situation in the country, to a great extent through the securitization of governance and unprecedented yield to the Kremlin's pressure.

2. Minsk seeks a way out of the political crisis, being unable to draw support of the West (this became clear when restrictive measures were imposed on the Belarusian defense industry) amid Moscow's pressure, and is forced to look for alternatives (for instance, cooperation with China and maneuvering within the CSTO).

3. Military activities in the region slightly deescalated, yet even the pandemic and economic downturn were not factors enough to curb the creeping buildup of forces and armament against the backdrop of reduced transparency. The Russia–NATO confrontation shifted southward to the Black and Azov Seas.

1. National security

Overall status of national security

The securitization of Belarus's politics and militarization of the state administration continued. The House of Representatives had the first read of the bill "On Public Service" in December. According to Labor Minister Iryna Kascievič, it brings the legal status of civil servants closer to that of military personnel, among other things, by adopting the concept of "discipline in office" for civilians, "by analogy with the army and paramilitary regulations."

In the course of their meeting on November 23, President Lukashenka and Defense Minister Chrienin spoke about patriotic upbringing (including in the context of recent protests) and possibilities to expand Belarus's involvement in peacekeeping operations, for example, as part of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon as the most realistic option.

Personnel reshuffles in security agencies

Some details of personnel reshuffle in law-enforcement agencies, which took place back in October, became known on January 3. Former KGB Chairman Valier Vakulčyk, who was appointed to the newly established position of presidential aide and Brest Region inspector, turned out to have been dismissed from the force together with Deputy Interior Minister Aliaksandr Barsukoŭ, who was appointed "presidential aide in Minsk." All of the key persons, who were in charge of preparing and implementing the forceful scenario of the presidential election, appear to have been removed from their respective offices without unwanted publicity.

Increasing role of Russia

Russian Foreign Intelligence Chief Naryshkin emphasized once again in early November that his agency was giving professional advice to Minsk on the activities of Western intelligence services with respect to Belarus amid the crisis in the country. Moscow is indeed making headway in dragging Minsk deeper into its political game, making good use of the internal and external political predicaments of the latter.

On November 19, the Interior Ministry of Belarus and the National Guard of Russia (Rosgvardia) entered into an agreement on cooperation in combating "terrorism and extremism." It provides legal grounds for sending Russian Interior Ministry troops to Belarus. Russia has a similar agreement with Uzbekistan, but it only concerns "terrorism."

Almost simultaneously, Defense Minister Chrienin reported an increase in the scale of the West-2021 exercise compared with the previous year. "It will take place at five training grounds that Belarus has," he said. He emphasized that the exercise would be international, as it will involve not only Russian troops.

On December 10, President Lukashenka approved the plan for the use of the regional army group of Belarus and Russia. The plan is yet to be considered by the Supreme State Council of the Union State. According to Chief of General Staff of Belarus Aliaksandr Valfovič, the new plan made by the military of both countries "provides an elaborate description of actions, including the application of the units delegated by Russia, and the areas to be used for the exercise."

Training and equipment of the army

In November and December, the Defense Ministry of Belarus did not issue reports on operational training at the battalion level and higher, although such exercises must have taken place. Deputy Minister of Defense for Ideology Leanid Kasinski said in November that

the intensity of operational training had increased by more than 20% since 2015, and the number of snap exercises with redeployment to the state border had doubled (more than 80 in 2020).

Indeed, according to Defense Minister Chrienin, 9,000 conscripts were drafted in 2020 to improve their professional skills, a considerable number for an army of 46,000 soldiers.

A five-day territorial defense training course for heads of district executive committees was conducted in early December at the Military Academy. It has been attended by more than 50 officials since 2018. A comprehensive inspection of territorial defense in the Mahilioŭ Region with a command-staff exercise took place on December 1-18. It has been the largest event of the kind so far. Territorial defense units were formed in three districts.

Defense Minister Chrienin said on November 23 on Belarus-1 TV channel that the approved army buildup plan for 2021-2025 mainly focused on the upgrade and procurement of weapons. He spoke about the purchase of four more Russian Su-30SM jets in 2021. Four Mi-35 aircraft will be delivered under the August contracts. Two infantry battalions will be rearmed with BTR-82A armored infantry vehicles. According to BelTA news agency, "this year's upgrade [of equipment] is based on the state's economic capabilities, and this policy will continue." However, given the difficult situation in the country, the recent contracts with Russia look more like a result of Moscow's pressure. This is also indicated by the fact that Minsk only allocated about EUR 26.3 million to finance the government program envisaging infrastructure development at military camps for the period 2021-2025, approved on November 16.

According to Chrienin, it is planned to buy electronic warfare and communication equipment, probably, mostly of Belarusian manufacture. Head of the central administration of the General Staff Ruslan Kasyhin said in November that a prototype of the BRDM-4B2 armored reconnaissance vehicle upgraded in Belarus for reconnaissance with the use of UAVs was purchased in 2020. There are plans to buy ten such vehicles to fully equip one reconnaissance battalion in 2021 together with buggy-type light vehicles, modern parachutes, Puma-type surveillance devices, new types of reconnaissance equipment and UAVs, mainly of domestic manufacture.

Head of the Missile and Artillery Armament Department of the Defense Ministry Vitaly Šestak made a similar report: more than 30 prototypes of missiles and artillery ordnance, mostly of domestic design, were put into service in 2020.

The BM-21B multiple rocket launcher was upgraded and passed preliminary tests in May and November. Small arms and ammunition produced by Belarusian BSVT-New Technologies LLC passed field tests in November.

In December, the EU imposed sanctions on several officers of the State Control Committee and the Interior Ministry and key defense enterprises: 140th Repair Plant, Agat Electromechanical Plant, Minsk Wheeled Tractor Plant and Beltechexport. This is actually a blow to the autonomy of the Belarusian defense industry and Minsk's ability to ensure its independence.

International contacts of the Belarusian army and security agencies

On November 23, Interior Minister Ivan Kubrakoŭ had a telephone conversation with member of the State Council of China, Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi. The latter said that "China resolutely opposed external forces' attempts to provoke a split and unrest in Belarusian society."

CSTO. On December 1, Russian Defense Minister Shoigu said after a session of the CSTO Defense Ministers' Council that the organization members would revise the plan of deployment of the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces "taking into account present-day realities", and that a draft agreement to create a comprehensive system of logistics, technical and medical support for the CSTO troops had been approved.

On the following day, the CSTO online summit approved the military cooperation plan for 2021-2025 and a new counter-drugs strategy. The participants in the summit also considered the matters related to logistics and medical support for the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces and training of state agencies' personnel.

The agreement has not been signed, though, and the CSTO continues to suffer from the lack of identity as an agency. Speaking at the session of the CSTO Collective Security Council on December 2, Lukashenka called on his CSTO counterparts to meet in order to discuss pressing security issues and threats in a broader format ("not only partners, but also the countries that share our commitments").

In November, CSTO Secretary General Zas invited proposals aimed at "synchronizing anti-terrorist efforts" of the CIS, CSTO and SCO, which Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov had called for in May.

A command and staff exercise with the CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Forces command was held on November 11-12 in the Moscow Region of Russia. Taking part in it were servicemen of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, the Joint Staff and the Secretariat of the CSTO. The exercise focused on the "automation and control of the airborne forces of the CSTO CRRF."

2. Regional Security

Overall situation in the region

NATO reported a certain increase in the number of emergency sorties to identify Russian aircraft that did not report flight details. There were more than 400 such sorties in 2020, of which 350 were associated with flights of Russian aircraft.

Similar complaints were voiced by the opposite side. The Baltic Fleet commander reported a thousand reconnaissance sorties near the state border in the area of responsibility of the Baltic Fleet in 2020, about 150 more than in 2019. "American strategic bombers approached our borders nearly a dozen times. There were only two such flights last year," he said.

The Biden Administration and Russia are likely to extend the Strategic Offensive Arms Treaty, which would be a positive development in the region following Biden's victorious presidential campaign. It is possible that the new U.S. Administration will also get back to the Open Skies Treaty, and negotiations will begin on a possible moratorium on the deployment of intermediate- and shorter-range missiles, especially those with nuclear warheads.

Situation in eastern Ukraine

The July ceasefire in eastern Ukraine was generally respected by the opposing sides. The Ukrainian command reported in November that the number of casualties in the conflict zone decreased 14-fold year -on-year, and the number of bombardments decreased 5.5-fold.

The NATO-Russia confrontation shifted southward. At the December 2 meeting, the NATO foreign ministers explicitly mentioned the intention to concentrate efforts in the Black Sea region, including through stepped up cooperation with Georgia and Ukraine. The action plan for Georgia's membership in NATO may be considered at the 2021 summit.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told Focus magazine on December 25 that a war between Russia and Ukraine over the water supply to Crimea was not ruled out. In the meantime, Ukraine has reinforced its army with the Turkish Bayraktar TB2 strike UAVs, and urgently procured the RK-360MC Neptune coastal missile system of domestic manufacture that had just been included in the inventory.

The Russian Black Sea Fleet conducted nine large-scale exercises in December. On December 18, Ukrainian Defense Minister Andriy Taran said that Russia was preparing for the deployment of nuclear weapons in Crimea, and we cannot rule out this possibility.

Exercises in the region

Fifteen relatively large exercises conducted by Russia near Belarus and nine by other countries combined were identified in the period under review. This information is incomplete, especially regarding Poland and the Baltic States.

Regional forces buildup

The ratification of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the United States by the Polish president on November 9 was a high-profile event. It provides for an increase in the American contingent in Poland by one thousand servicemen to 5,500 personnel in total, and the transfer of the reactivated American V Corps headquarters from Germany to Poznan, which had been done by the end of the month.

The above was taking place in the setting of minimal dialogue and trust between Poland and its neighbors. Belarusian state media claimed that Polish security services made two attempts to recruit Belarusian military diplomats in November and December. Some of their opponents echoed the harsh statements made by Russian and, to a lesser extent,

Belarusian officials. Head of the National Security Department in the Chancellery of Poland's prime minister Stanisław Żaryn called Minsk and Moscow's concerns over the growing foreign military presence in Poland "total nonsense." Emphasizing the defensive nature of the deployment of the U.S. forces, Żaryn said that the agreement paved the way for a further increase in the U.S. military presence (and its possible rapid increase to 20,000 personnel) and the number of joint exercises.

As reported in December, a new division will be formed in the Kaliningrad Region in 2021 as part of Russia's force buildup there, which has been going on since 2016.

Armament

Summing up the results of the year, the Russian Defense Ministry said that the ten-year armament program had been successfully completed, and the share of modern weapons in the armed forces had reached an all-time high of 70%. Minister Shoigu stated that "the defense capacity of the army increased by 13%." In particular, the Baltic Fleet was reinforced in November and December with the Odintsovo fast attack craft armed with the Pantsir-M and Kalibr guided missiles (November 21) and the high-speed landing boat of 02510 type (November 24).

Ukraine also made considerable rearmament efforts and began to urgently procure foreign equipment, even though Ukrainian analogs were basically available. It became known in early November that the Ukrainian army was going to buy an unspecified number of used 152 mm Dana-M2 self-propelled antitank guns manufactured in Czechoslovakia. On 14 December, Ukrainian Defense Minister Taran signed agreements with Turkish companies on technology transfer and production of corvettes and strike drones for the Ukrainian armed forces. Chief of General Staff of Ukraine's army Ruslan Homchak said in late November that Ukraine would buy five more Turkish Bayraktar TB2 UAVs in 2021 in addition to those six it procured previously. According to Defense Minister Taran, this will "massively strengthen the Ukrainian Navy."

On December 29, the Defense Ministry of Ukraine and Antonov Company signed a memorandum on the first ever purchase of three An-178 military transport aircraft for the Ukrainian army.

NATO members were less active in terms of armament. The Lithuanian authorities reported on November 13 the execution of a contract for the purchase of four Sikorsky UH-60M Black Hawk transport helicopters worth USD 213 million to replace three Soviet Mi-8 and three French Aerospatiale AS365 helicopters.

It became known on November 17 that 18 Leopard 2A4 tanks of the Polish army had been upgraded to Leopard 2PL. As reported on December 7, the Polish army received 24 SPZR Poprad short-range air defense systems. On December 19, the Polish army was supplied with the first of six ordered PILICA short-range surface-to-air missile systems.

In late December, the Defense Materiel Agency under the Ministry of National Defense of Lithuania signed a USD 10 million contract with the United States on the supply of additional missiles, launchers and other components of the Javelin anti-tank guided missile launchers.

Infrastructure

On November 13, the Latvian army in cooperation with LMT opened Europe's first 5G military training facility at the Adazi military base for practicing the application of this technology for defense purposes.

A new combined arms training ground (69 square kilometers in area) was put into operation in December in the Voronezh Region of Russia. In 2020, around 2,000 apartments were provided to servicemen of the combined arms army of the Western Military District in the Voronezh, Bryansk, Smolensk, Kursk and Belgorod Regions. This indirectly evidences the force buildup in the western regions of Russia.

Forecast

Given the current investments in armament and buildup of forces by the countries of the region and their foreign allies, as well as the correlation of interests of NATO and Ukraine, we can expect that in the long term, the epicenter of the NATO-Russia confrontation will continue to shift toward the Black Sea. This may take the pressure off Belarus, but it will still be losing chances to avoid getting dragged into the confrontation between the two blocs.

Despite all attempts made by Minsk to withstand the Kremlin's pressure, the international crisis around Belarus will force the country's leadership to make further concessions to Russia. One should expect new exercises, arms purchases, revision of fundamental defense arrangements, etc.

Although Minsk and Moscow resolve all most pressing security issues bilaterally, it is likely that the CSTO institutions that have basically existed on paper so far will have to be actively involved. The Kremlin will use them to grow stronger in the world scene and for prestige reasons, while Belarus will resort to them to address the imbalance in the relationship with Russia by means of situational alliances with other members of the organization.

Appendix 1

Catalogue of events underlying the relations development indices

Relationship with Russia

Date	Event	Score
1 November	Reduction in roaming fees	+1
3 November	Connection of the first unit of the Belarusian nuclear power plant to the national grid	+2
4 November	Putin and Lukashenka have a telephone conversation	+1
6 November	Telephone conversation between Mishustin and Haloŭčanka	+1
26 November	Lavrov's visit to Minsk	+1
30 November	Telephone conversation between Mishustin and Haloŭčanka	+1
4 December	Video conference of the EEU heads of government	+1
10 December	Lukashenka approves the plan for the use of the joint force grouping	+2
14 December	Makiej and Mezentsev have a meeting focused on integration	+1
15 December	Board meeting of education agencies	+1
17 December	KGB head Cierciel's visit to Grodno Azot. Statement about "Russian puppeteers"	-1
24 December	Approvals of the gas prices protocol	+1
22 December	Crude oil supply agreements with Russian companies	+1
30 December	First installment of the Russian government loan received	+1
November-December	Removal of restrictions on meat and dairy products	+1
November-December	Russian government distances itself from regulating crude supplies	-1
November-December	Media policy of the leading Russian talk shows becomes less favorable towards the Belarusian authorities	-1
November-December	Foreign policy support, statements by Lavrov, Naryshkin, Peskov, Volodin, Mezentsev, etc.	+1
Total		**+14**

Relationship with the EU

Date	Event	Score
11 November	Negative statement by the speakers of both chambers of the National Assembly about the Bundestag's resolution concerning the situation in Belarus	-1
17 November	Minsk's decisions to downgrade its participation in the Eastern Partnership to the expert level and suspend the Belarus-EU coordination group	-2
17 November	Statement by the Belarusian Foreign Ministry condemning the decision of the Council of the EU to impose additional restrictive measures against Minsk; Minsk's decision to mirror the move by expanding its sanctions list against the EU	-3
8 December	Uladzimir Makiej meets with French Ambassador Nicolas de Lacoste as the latter presents copies of his credentials	+1
9 December	Makiej's meeting with the ambassadors of the EU member states	+2
10 December	Biting comment by Uladzimir Makiej on the EU Delegation's report about Belarus's meeting with the EU's ambassadors the day before	-1
15 December	Belarus suspends deliveries of oil products through the seaport of Klaipeda in Lithuania	-2
16 December	Cancellation of the visit of experts of the European Commission and the European Nuclear Safety Regulatory Group (ENSREG) to the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant	-2
17 December	Statement by the Belarusian Ministry of Energy about its intention to continue cooperation with the ENSREG and its willingness to receive European experts at the nuclear power plant "at any time"	+1
18 December	Statement by the Belarusian Foreign Ministry condemning the decision of the EU Council to impose a third package of restrictive measures against Minsk; Belarus is preparing "quite sensitive" retaliatory measures	-3
23 December	Negative statements by the House of Representatives and the Council of the Republic in connection with the European Parliament's resolution on Belarus	-1
November-December	Numerous negative materials in the official media and statements by the country's leadership regarding the EU; direct accusations against individual EU member states of interference in Belarus's internal affairs and attempts of military influence	-4
November-December	Individual statements by Belarusian officials that Minsk is still interested in mutually beneficial cooperation with the EU and is ready to return to dialogue in case the EU's policy changes	+1
Total		**-14**

Relationship with China

Date	Event	Score
2 November	Creation of the Belarus–China Working Group for Trade Facilitation	+1
4 November	Opening of the Confucius Institute at the Pushkin State University in Brest	+1
5 November	Participation of a Belarusian delegation in the China International Import Expo (Shanghai, offline and online participation)	+1
10 November	Belarus–China business forum "China–Belarus: trade and economic relations, cooperation prospects, investment potential" within the framework of the China International Import Expo	+1
12 November	Foreign Minister Makiej meets with Ambassador of China to Belarus Xie Xiaoyong as he presents copies of his credentials	+1
17 November	Foreign minister makes positive comments about China in his interview to the Belarus 1 TV channel	+1
17 November	Belarus–China Youth Innovation Forum "New Horizons 2020"	+1
19 November	Jury Sianko appointed ambassador of Belarus to China	+1
19 November	3rd meeting of the Commission for Science and Technology Cooperation of the Sino-Belarusian Intergovernmental Committee on Cooperation	+1
14 December	Meeting of the Belarus–China Intergovernmental Committee on Cooperation (videoconference)	+1
15 December	First specialized trade session for selling lumber to China via the Belarusian Universal Commodity Exchange	+1
18 December	Establishment of the Customs and Quarantine Commission of the Belarus–China Intergovernmental Committee on Cooperation	+1
21 December	Signing of an agreement on twin relationships between the Hrodna Region and Hainan Province	+1
23 December	Opening of the Sino-Belarusian center for cooperation in science and technology at the Great Stone Industrial Park	+1
24 December	Opening of the Culture and Information Center of Belarus in Haikou, Hainan Province	+1
Total		**+15**

Relationship with the U.S.

Date	Event	Score
6 November	Pompeo's statement about the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism report	-1
7 November	Briefing by George Kent, statement about the non-recognition of election outcome	-1
7 November	Negative statements about the presidential election in the U.S.	-1
11 November	Pompeo's statement about the expulsion of British diplomats	-1
12 November	Pompeo's statement about human rights violations in Belarus	-1
14 November	Statement of the U.S. Embassy concerning the death of Raman Bandarenka	-1
16 November	Meeting of the HTP director Usievalad Jančeŭski with U.S. Chargé d'affaires Jeffrey Giauque	+1
17 November	Joint statement by the Embassies of the EU, the UK, Switzerland and the U.S. in connection with the aggravating human rights situation in Belarus	-1
18 November	U.S. congressman Christopher Smith on the situation in Belarus	-1
19 November	The U.S. House of Representatives passes the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act	-1
26 November	Statement of the U.S. Embassy condemning the acts of the Belarusian authorities against journalists	-1
27 November	Lukashenka on the U.S.' interest in the crisis in Belarus	-1
4 December	U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun on human rights violations in Belarus	-1
7 December	WHO with the assistance of USAID supplies thermal imagers and COVID-19 protection gear to Minsk Airport	+1
9 December	Heads of the EU Delegation and diplomatic missions of the EU member states, as well as the UK, Switzerland and the U.S. meet with Foreign Minister Makiej	+1
16 December	The U.S. Senate confirms Julie Fischer as ambassador to Belarus	+1
15 December	U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Biegun discusses the situation in Belarus with Cichanoŭskaja	-1
16 December	Interview by Škliaraŭ for Echo of Moscow. Positive statements about Lukashenka	+1
22 December	The Senate approves the bill "Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act"	-1
23 December	The U.S. imposes additional restrictive measures on Belarus.	-3
24 December	Julie Fischer is sworn in as ambassador to Belarus	+1

Date	Event	Score
24 December	Council of the Republic considers the updated Belarus Democracy Act adopted by the U.S. a threat to international peace and security	-1
24 December	Statement by Belarusian Foreign Ministry on the U.S. sanctions and counter-sanctions	-1
28 December	Trump approves the updated Belarus Democracy Act	-2
29 December	Foreign Ministry: the Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act is an unfriendly step and blatant interference	-1
Total		**-14**

Relationship with Ukraine

Date	Event	Score
1 November	Temporary restrictions on entry into the territory of Belarus from Ukraine come into effect	-1
7 November	Belneftekhim completes construction of the 9th well at Machukhskoe field in Ukraine for Naftogaz	+1
11 November	Meeting of the Belarus-Ukraine advisory council for cooperation, proposals on expanding cooperation and minimizing the impact of the business slump	+1
11 November	Agreements are signed on cooperation in the petrochemical sector	+1
11 November	Cooperation agreements between regional chambers of commerce and industry are signed	+1
11 November	Belarus's commodity export to Ukraine down in January-September in year-on-year terms	-1
12 November	MTZ's export of machinery to Ukraine up by 10.8% yr-on-yr in January-October	+1
13 November	Lukashenka's interview for Ukraine's 112 TV Channel	+1
13 November	Lukashenka suggests keeping the negotiating forum on the situation in the east of Ukraine in Minsk	+1
13 November	Motor Sich airline resumes flights between Zaporizhzhya and Minsk	+1
14 November	Ukrtransnafta sells 80,000 tonnes of Azerbaijani crude to BNK-Ukraine	+1
16 November	Viciebsk Skylifts begins production of a telescopic boom skylift and starts working on an order from Ukraine	+1
17 November	Institute of Applied Physics of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and Ukraine's Z.I. Nekrasov Institute of Ferrous Industry of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine enter into an agreement on innovative cooperation	+1
18 November	Office of the Honorary Consulate of Belarus in Lviv suspends operations	-1
19 November	Opening of the Chojniki frontier station near the radiation environmental reserve on the border with Ukraine	-1
19 November	A border monitoring and remote control center covering 100 kilometers of the border with Ukraine is established at the Chojniki station; the project supported by the U.S. Department of Energy envisages cooperation in the prevention of illicit traffic of nuclear materials and other radioactive substances	-1
20 November	Ukraine joins the EU's sanctions against Belarus	-3
23 November	Belarusian Armed Forces plan to expand participation in peacekeeping missions based on the experience of the peacekeeping company in Viciebsk, which performs tasks at the UN mission (Lebanon) and the OSCE mission (Ukraine)	-1
26 November	Statement by Makiej on the results of the board meetings of the Russian and Belarusian Foreign Ministries, which viewed the Ukrainian sanctions against Belarus as "a mockery of common sense", and willingness to introduce retaliatory measures	-1

Date	Event	Score
26 November	Ukrainian ambassador to Minsk receives a note of protest in connection with a series of anti-Belarusian acts outside the Belarusian embassy in Kyiv and security deficit at the diplomatic mission	-2
26 November	Ukraine's Foreign Ministry calls Belarus's note regarding the Kyiv protests groundless and excessively emotional	-1
27 November	Lukashenka voices excerpts from secret service intel on the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry's plans to help Poland "smother" Belarus	-1
27 November	Kuleba's explanatory statement refuting the excerpts from secret service data presented by Lukashenka	-1
27 November	JSC Belarusian Shipping Company is upgrading three vessels in order to strengthen the fleet used to deliver export/import cargoes from/to Ukraine by sea-river ships	+1
27 November	Video documenting system and digital radio stations supplied to Hrodna regional customs	-1
30 November	Mozyr Refinery's January-October liquefied gas supplies to Ukraine down yr-on-yr	-1
4 December	BOC signed long term contracts for fuel supplies to Ukraine amid drops in refining volumes	+1
7 December	Opening of the Dziaražyčy modular frontier post on the border with Ukraine. Since October 10, it has monitored a 20+ kilometer river section of the border; the post is integrated into the Chojniki post's monitoring system	-1
7 December	Belarus votes against the strengthened resolution of the UN General Assembly on Russian militarization of Crimea (Ukraine's initiative)	-2
7 December	Ukrainian foreign minister speaks against the imposition of economic restrictions on Belarus, at least for the time being	+1
9 December	Anti-Trust Committee of Ukraine allows selling a controlling stake in BTA Bank in Ukraine to Belarusian businessman Varabiej	+1
8 December	Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus to limit border crossing starting from December 21, 2020, including for foreigners residing in Belarus	-1
10 December	Amkodor delivers its first harvester to Ukraine	+1
11 December	Ukraine's Foreign Ministry regulates the situation with Ukrainian citizens entering the territory of Belarus to receive medical treatment	+1
13 December	Activists stage a rally in downtown Kyiv against the Belarusian authorities	-1
14 December	Consular services of the Ukrainian Embassy in Belarus are partially suspended	-1
15 December	Commemorative coins are issued and put into circulation by the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus and the National Bank of Ukraine	+1
16 December	Opening of the Almany post of the Pinsk frontier detachment, which reinforces the border with Ukraine, including the scarcely passable part of the Almany Bogs reserve	-1
16 December	Belarus votes in favor and Ukraine against the UN General Assembly Resolution condemning the glorification of Nazism, proposed by Russia	-2

Date	Event	Score
18 December	BOC shareholders announce a change in the BNK-Ukraine management from October 12, 2020	+1
19 December	BELAZ delivers six 45-tonne dump trucks to Ukraine	+1
21 December	Decision to limit border crossings via land checkpoints comes into force	-1
21 December	Verkhovna Rada MP Yevhen Shevchenko, a member of the ruling Servant of the People party, visits Minsk in order to maintain and promote ties with Belarus	+1
22 December	Meeting of Verkhovna Rada MP Shevchenko with members of the Belarusian Parliament in the Committee on Foreign Affairs	+1
22 December	Head of the Servant of the People parliamentary faction clarifies that Shevchenko is on vacation and his opinion is not shared by the party and the leadership of the country	-1
23 December	Ukraine simplifies the procedure for Belarusians to stay in its territory (lifts the 90-day limit; simplifies issuance of residence permits to highly qualified specialists)	-1
27 December	State Border Guard Service of Ukraine specifies the number of officially discovered weapons – 48 items, compared to "tonnes" announced in Belarus	-1
28 December	National Bank of Ukraine denies sale of BTA Bank in Ukraine to Belarusian businessman Varabiej citing "absence of irreproachable business reputation of the applicant" (soon after the EU imposed restrictive measures against Varabiej)	-1
29 December	Interview of Ambassador of Ukraine to Belarus Kizim to Belarusian Smartpress portal	+1
31 December	Belarus signs long-term contract with SOCAR (Azerbaijan) for deliveries of crude via the Odessa-Brody pipeline	+4
Total		**-4**

Appendix 2

Catalogue of events underlying the security indices

Date	Event	National security	Regional tension
November-December	Progress of the conflict in eastern Ukraine	+1	+1
November-December	9 exercises of Ukraine and NATO	0	-1
November-December	15 exercises of Russia	0	-1
November-December	Increased number of Russia-NATO airspace incidents	-1	-1
November-December	Decisions to procure Turkish military hardware for the Ukrainian army	0	-1
November	Joe Biden's victory in the presidential election in the U.S.	0	+1
November	Ratification of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement between the United States and Poland; transfer of the reactivated American V Corps headquarters to Poznan	-1	-1
19 November	Signing of the agreement between the Interior Ministry of Belarus and the Russian National Guard	-2	-1
November	Successful field tests of small arms and ammunition manufactured in Belarus	+1	0
23 November	Coordination of the development plan of the Belarusian armed forces for 2021-2025 and probably related decisions on large-scale arms purchases from Russia	+1	-1
December	Shift of the focus of confrontation between Ukraine/NATO and Russia to the Azov-Black Sea region	+1	-1
Early December	Territorial defense training course for heads of district executive committees of Belarus	+1	0
1-18 December	Inspection of Mahilioŭ regional territorial defense with a command and staff exercise	+1	0
December	Statement on the formation of a new division in the Kaliningrad Region of Russia	0	-1
17 December	EU sanctions against the key defense enterprises and officers of the State Control Committee and Interior Ministry	-1	-1
December	Decision on the militarization of the state administration of Belarus	-1	0
Total		**0**	**-8 (Yellow)**

Appendix 3

Colour scale of regional security tensions

Colour Value	Numerical Value	Interpretation
White	higher than -1	Low likelihood of escalation. A 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. The situation calls for cautious attention.
Yellow	from -7 to -12	Military and other activity is observed that is capable of leading to an escalation of tensions. The situation calls for close attention.
Orange	from -13 to -17	Military preparations in the region. Growing tensions. The situation is threatening.
Red	-18 and lower	A dramatic escalation of tensions. The conflict is virtually unavoidable. A pre-war situation.

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The project is implemented in partnership with the Pact nonprofit international development organization with the support of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).