



# Four scenarios for Belarus by the end of 2023

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# Executive Summary

This Policy Paper outlines four possible scenarios for the future of the Belarusian sovereignty by the end of 2023. The scenarios are based on two key drivers that are crucial for the sovereignty of Belarus: Russian pressure on Belarus and resilience of Belarus.

The Policy Paper creates a framework for alternative thinking and outlines important insights, chances, and risks. It also formulates a desirable short-term scenario for the Belarusian sovereignty and gives policy recommendations on how to possibly contribute to it.

**In order to contribute to the preservation of the Belarusian sovereignty, the following goals are recommended for various actors to be reached:**

- **Goal 1:** There is no further integration with Russia; Belarusian government makes independent political decisions in as many areas as possible.
- **Goal 2:** Belarus has as diversified access to economic, financial, and diplomatic resources as possible.
- **Goal 3:** There is a basic consensus between the government and the people, including parts of civil society, about the political course of Belarus.

# Overview of Scenarios

## “Russian Protectorate”



**Russian pressure on Belarus: high | Resilience of Belarus: low**

Russia develops a proposal for deeper integration with Belarus as a compensation for significant losses on the battlefield with Ukraine. Lukashenka and a minor part of the Belarusian society accept it. Although most of the Belarusians are opposed to this scenario, they cannot resist because of increased crack-down on civil society structures and harsh repressions, forcing many into exile. **“Black Swans”**: none.

## “Sovereignty by Default”



**Russian pressure on Belarus: low | Resilience of Belarus: low**

Despite the Kremlin’s attempts at asserting pressure, Lukashenka survives a Russian botched coup d’état. By the end of 2023, Belarus has maintained sovereignty thanks to a weakened Russia and its mistakes. In Belarus, Lukashenka and parts of pro-Russian elites negotiate a power-sharing arrangement. Repressions against Belarusian society continue, while there is no appetite to improve relations with the West.

**“Black Swan”**:

- Out of frustration toward the Belarusian leadership not willing to join the war, Russia attempts to change power in Minsk by a coup d’état. The coup fails: Lukashenka shows resistance and maintains power.

## “Big BY-alogue”



**Russian pressure on Belarus: low | Resilience of Belarus: high**

After severe defeats in Ukraine, Russia presses Lukashenka to send Belarusian troops to Ukraine. He refuses and Russia removes him from power. Belarusian army enters the war, but it does not help: new defeats lead to inner turmoil in Russia. Belarusian society is mobilized against the war, and rational parts of Belarusian elites start a national dialogue with society.

**“Black Swans”**:

- Lukashenka is replaced from within by pro-Russian hard-liners backed by Moscow to have Belarus fully enter the war.
- Major successes of the Ukrainian army, including the liberation of Crimea, spark unrest in Russian regions and a split in Russian elites.
- The hard-liners in Minsk are in turn replaced by regime pragmatists who use Russia’s distraction to launch a national dialogue to save Belarus.

## “Union against Russia”



**Russian pressure on Belarus: high | Resilience of Belarus: high**

Triggered by Ukrainian military advancement, the Kremlin intensifies its actions to increase Russian influence on Belarusian political structures and regional elites through financial backing ahead of upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections. Lukashenka uncovers this and starts restoring relations with the West to get financial support, maintain power, and increase societal support in Belarus. A Round Table with democratic forces is scheduled for 2024.

**“Black Swans”**:

- The power bloc, remaining loyal to Lukashenka, reveals a conspiracy of Russia to orchestrate his removal in the course of elections in 2024 and 2025 through bribery and financial backing of political structures, regional elites and individuals in the power bloc.
- A gas tanker truck explodes at a tactical nuclear weapons storage facility under construction due to the carelessness of Russian personnel, causing casualties and damage to buildings.

# Chapter 1: Methodology

The dependence of the Belarusian regime on Russia's political, economic, and military support has significantly increased since the 2020 post-electoral protests and the start of the Russian full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022. Belarus has been providing its territory as well as its military and civilian infrastructure for Russian military attacks against Ukraine, while Belarusian democratic forces and international experts point at the increased **danger for Belarus to lose its sovereignty** in the near future. Also, the developments in Belarus will play a crucial role for the security and stability in Eastern Europe as a whole. Even though Belarus has almost disappeared from the European and international agenda after February 2022, there is a need for international and Belarusian actors to consider probable short-term future narratives for Belarus.

Since the beginning of the Russian full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, it has become clear that the situation can change unpredictably and very quickly. It is therefore important to think of different scenarios. Between February and April 2023, **fifteen experts from institutions operating in Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Germany, Sweden, Finland, and UK** worked on four short-term scenarios for Belarus until the end of 2023.

All the narratives in the scenarios meet the criteria of plausibility and answer the question "Is this scenario probable?" instead of "Will this really take place?". Instead of the repetition of past trends and speculation about the likelihood of their reoccurrence in the future, our experts focused on key events that might lead to a qualitative change of the current situation. The **purpose of the paper** is, therefore, not to predict the most probable future, but to create a framework for alternative thinking in order to **be ready for most unexpected events and threats** and initiate corresponding political thinking and action.

The policy paper's question was formulated as follows:

**"What will the Belarusian sovereignty look like by the end of 2023?"**

For the scope of the policy paper, the Belarusian sovereignty was defined as follows:

*"The ability of state authorities to make own decisions on foreign and domestic policy of Belarus, including the ability to withdraw from integration agreements with Russia".*

The scenarios are based on two key drivers that are crucial for the sovereignty of Belarus in the near future: Russian pressure on Belarus and resilience of Belarus. By choosing these drivers, the experts admitted that Russian influence in Belarus has become critical and seriously endangers its sovereignty.

The policy paper presents four scenarios, each structured as follows:

1. Overview of the situation by the end of 2023 (Situation);
2. Impact of the war in Ukraine on the situation in Belarus ("War Factor");
3. Probable developments from now until the end of 2023 (Timeline);
4. Impact of each scenario on six relevant areas (Areas of Application);
5. Summary of most relevant insights, chances, risks, and recommendations for various groups of decision makers.

## 1.1. Key Assumptions

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Prior to the work on the scenarios, the experts analyzed the current situation in Belarus. The goal was to formulate key assumptions about the developments in and around Belarus, which could then serve as a point of reference for the scenarios.

Looking forward to the end of 2023, the following key assumptions have been formulated:

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Belarusian Society and State</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belarus is not a democratic state.</li> <li>• Lukashenka is determined to stay in power by all means.</li> <li>• Belarusian society is shaped by different geopolitical views (e.g., pro-Russian / pro-Western).</li> <li>• Emigration is mainly an option for people not supporting the Lukashenka regime.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Belarusian Economy</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belarusian economy is stagnating but not collapsing.</li> <li>• Belarusian economy continues to depend on Russia and its energy supplies.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Belarusian Democratic Forces</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belarusian democratic forces exercise pressure on Lukashenka.</li> <li>• Belarusian democratic forces act mostly from exile.</li> <li>• Belarusian democratic forces are partly fragmented (not fully united).</li> <li>• Belarusian diaspora and civil society support Ukraine.</li> </ul>                            |
| <b>Russia</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Russia's war in Ukraine is not over.</li> <li>• There is no military escalation between NATO and Russia.</li> <li>• The war in Ukraine consumes a considerable part of resources in Russia.</li> <li>• Russian elites want to keep their influence in Belarus.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Western States</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Western states maintain, extend, or do not cancel completely their sanctions against Russia / Belarus.</li> <li>• EU / Western states support Belarusian democratic forces.</li> <li>• Western states continue to support Ukraine.</li> </ul>  |

## 1.2. Key Drivers

The experts have outlined the most influential forces which would affect the Belarusian sovereignty from now until the end of 2023. On the domestic policy front, they took into consideration the level of social cohesion and the degree of polarization in Belarus, the level of popular trust enjoyed by the Lukashenka regime as well as the willingness of people and the elites to integrate with Russia. As for the regime, they examined the ability of Lukashenka and his inner circle to rule in Belarus, along with their readiness to use repressions against dissidents. Russia, Ukraine, and the West have been defined as most impactful external actors. Developments in the war in Ukraine, and the Belarusian involvement in the war, were seen as factors that could influence the Belarusian sovereignty. At the same time, the degree of Russian influence in Belarus is decisive for preserving Belarus as an independent state. While examining the Russian factor, the experts have outlined possible internal developments in Russia (e.g., economic collapse), further expansion of the “Russian World” in Belarus, as well as further implementation of the Union Treaty roadmaps. Finally, the experts have analyzed the Western states’ policies toward the democratic movements in Eastern Europe / Belarus, as well as their policy of sanctions against Belarus and Russia.

After identifying political, economic, and social factors, experts have ranked them in order of importance and uncertainty. They chose both critically important and highly uncertain factors relevant for the short-term outlooks since such drivers are essential for the development of scenarios.

**For this analytical exercise, the following drivers were chosen as the most unpredictable and important:**

- Ability of Lukashenka and his inner circle to rule in Belarus;
- Degree of integration between Belarus and Russia within the Union State;
- Degree of Russian support to the regime of Lukashenka;
- War in Ukraine;
- Degree of Belarus’s involvement in the war against Ukraine;
- Social mobilization in Belarus;
- Relations between Belarus and the West.

### Definition of Key Drivers

For the purpose of the exercise, the experts have formulated only two drivers that are most crucial for the further development of the situation around the Belarusian sovereignty:


- **Russian pressure on Belarus**  
This driver ranges between Russia deciding to annex Belarus (high level) and not being able to exert pressure on Belarus (low level).
- **Resilience of Belarus**  
This driver indicates the reaction of the Belarusian elites on the Russian pressure. It ranges between starting a national dialogue with society (high level) and integrating with Russian elites while Belarusian society is unable to intervene (low level).

The interplay of these two drivers sums up the four scenarios about the Belarusian sovereignty until the end of 2023. The Scenario Compass below shows different combinations of these drivers (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Scenario Compass



### 1.3. “Black Swans”

Each scenario introduces a **“Black Swan”**  factor. “Black Swans” are rare and unpredictable events with severe consequences. They speed up developments and illustrate which events could become game-changers.

### 1.4. Areas of Application

Each scenario analyzes the effects of interplay of the abovementioned drivers in the following areas:

1. Political Situation and Stability of the Regime
2. Society and Civil Society
3. Democratic Forces in Exile
4. Belarus-Russia Relations
5. Belarus-Ukraine Relations
6. Belarus-EU Relations




# Chapter 2: Four Scenarios for Belarus-2023



## “Russian Protectorate”

**Russian pressure on Belarus: high**  
**Resilience of Belarus: low**

Russia develops a proposal for deeper integration with Belarus as a compensation for significant losses on the battlefield with Ukraine. Lukashenka and a minor part of the Belarusian society accept it. Although most of the Belarusians are opposed to this scenario, they cannot resist because of increased crack-down on civil society structures and harsh repressions, forcing many into exile.

 “Black Swans”: none

## “Russian Protectorate”

Russian pressure on Belarus: ↑  
Resilience of Belarus: ↓

### Situation

Russia experiences a set-back in the war against Ukraine and decides to compensate for the losses by developing a proposal for comprehensive integration with Belarus. Lukashenka and the Belarusian elites fully adapt to the new rules imposed by Russia. As a result, Belarus’s foreign, security, and (partly) financial and economic policies fall under the Kremlin’s control, while Lukashenka maintains certain power over Belarusian domestic politics. Thus, Belarusian sovereignty becomes significantly limited.

Most of the Belarusians are against deeper integration with Russia, but they cannot resist and are being silenced through repressions or forced into exile.

### “War factor”

In May-June, Russia fails to advance on the battlefield with Ukraine and, to compensate for the losses, it decides to strengthen its political, economic, and military ties with its “last ally in the region” – Belarus, proposing an even more comprehensive integration between the two countries.

### Timeline

After the new plans for integration between Belarus and Russia are announced, parts of the Belarusian society resist via diverse underground actions, but they fail to succeed due to Lukashenka’s large-scale and harsh repressions. The leverage of the Belarusian democratic forces to influence the situation inside the country is further reduced.

In July, Russia develops a Treaty on advanced integration within the Union State. The Treaty 1) envisages forming a common defense space and creating an unlimited amount of Russian military bases in Belarus, 2) provides control to

Russia over security-related ministries and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and 3) introduces common currency (Russian ruble) with one emission center in Moscow by 2030. On 9 August, Belarus and Russia sign the new Treaty without informing the public.

In September, Lukashenka publicly announces the decision on deeper integration with Russia and declares that the All-Belarusian People’s Assembly will hold a meeting and vote on it in spring 2024. The Constitutional Court confirms the legality of Lukashenka’s decision.

The Western capitals do not recognize the decision: it is considered illegitimate and seen as an act of Russian expansionism. They announce a new round of sanctions and synchronize their sanctions policy against Russia and Belarus. Belarusian democratic forces also do not recognize Lukashenka’s decision as legitimate.

The provisions of the Treaty on advanced integration start to be implemented in October, resulting in reshaping of the Belarusian institutions: common “Union” Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, and Defense are formed, while National Bank, Ministry of Economy, and Ministry of Finance are subordinated to the Union State controlled by Russia.

### Political Situation and Stability of the Regime

Lukashenka fully accepts Putin’s integration proposal. Although most of the Belarusian elites are against it, only a tiny part of them openly voices their disagreement. As a result, they are either fired or repressed. On another pole, a relatively small but vocal group of elites, representing pro-Russian hardliners, welcomes these developments. The political regime in Belarus continues its existence as a stable autocracy, which however de facto survives

and acts in a modality of a Russian protectorate with limited powers.

Belarusian sovereignty becomes significantly limited, i.e., Belarus's foreign, security, and (partly) financial and economic policies are being defined and controlled by the Kremlin. Lukashenka retains power over Belarusian domestic politics, e.g., he can still appoint the state officials on the local and national level, pursue public policies and keep control over society.

### **Society and Civil Society**

The Lukashenka regime continues destroying civil society and political opposition parties. At the same time, it intensifies the process of creating pro-governmental organizations and promotes regime-linked political parties, which cover the whole range of political ideologies (Communists, Liberal Democratic Party, and Belaya Rus as a "catch all" party).

As a result of repressions and a lack of people's vision of their future in Belarus, a new wave of labor migration starts. Belarusian identity is being "repressed". It becomes a marker of "friend or foe" identification: the Lukashenka regime uses it to identify those who are loyal and who can pose danger to the stability of his rule and to Russia. Belarusian language and national symbols become even stronger unifying factors for the democratic forces and all Belarusians with pro-European geopolitical orientations.

### **Democratic Forces in Exile**

Belarusian democratic forces continue their current pro-Ukrainian, anti-Russian, anti-Lukashenka, as well as pro-Western rhetoric, and they become more radical in their discourse and actions (e.g., lobbying for further sanctions against Lukashenka and Putin, supporting Belarusian diaspora, etc.). They maintain close cooperation with Western stakeholders and gain a window of opportunity for cooperation with the Ukrainian government as it cuts off diplomatic relations with Minsk. However, their influence in Belarus dramatically decreases because of the repression and atomization of Belarusians who still reside in the country. They become more and more a "government in exile" without real

support on the ground.

### **Belarus-Russia Relations**

The Putin regime treats Belarus as an extension of Russia's territory where Lukashenka acts as one of Russia's governors (in a way similar to Chechnya or Dagestan). Belarus is turned into a Russian protectorate where Lukashenka and elite preserve a limited control over some spheres of domestic policies. Foreign, security, and (partly) financial and economic policies are being subordinated to the Kremlin. The extent of Belarus-Russia trade continues to grow, and Russia starts to get direct control over key Belarusian state enterprises. Most of the roadmaps and agreements concluded within the Union State, as well as the new Treaty on advanced integration, are being implemented.

### **Belarus-Ukraine Relations**

Official Kyiv cuts off all diplomatic relations and channels of communication with the Belarusian regime and Lukashenka in particular. Ukrainian ambassador in Belarus returns back to Ukraine. Ukraine joins the EU, the USA, and other democratic countries in their policy of non-recognizing Lukashenka as a leader of Belarus. Official Kyiv supports all sanctions against Belarus and starts to develop closer cooperation with the Belarusian democratic forces. In addition, Ukrainian authorities increase support to Belarusians who struggle for Ukraine and advocate for release of Belarusian political prisoners.

### **Belarus-EU Relations**

The EU, the USA, and other democratic governments impose further sanctions against Russia and Belarus as well as downscale their diplomatic relations with the official Minsk. The West does not recognize the decisions concerning further integration of Russia and Belarus and considers them illegitimate. In parallel, the EU continues its support of Belarusian democratic forces, civil society, media, activists, diverse educational and youth initiatives. Thus, the EU toolkit of actions vis-à-vis Belarus includes mostly sanctions, non-recognition policy, and societal support. The EU de facto has minimal relations with the Belarusian government and conducts only closed consultations and meetings to solve urgent problems.



## “Sovereignty by Default”

**Russian pressure on Belarus: low**  
**Resilience of Belarus: low**

Despite the Kremlin’s attempts at asserting pressure, Lukashenka survives a Russian botched coup d’état. By the end of 2023, Belarus has maintained sovereignty thanks to a weakened Russia and its mistakes. In Belarus, Lukashenka and parts of pro-Russian elites negotiate a power-sharing agreement. Repressions against Belarusian society continue, while there is no appetite to improve relations with the West.

🦢 “Black Swan”:

- Out of frustration toward the Belarusian leadership not willing to join the war, Russia attempts to change power in Minsk by a coup d’état. The coup fails: Lukashenka shows resistance and maintains power.

## “Sovereignty by Default”

Russian pressure on Belarus: ↓  
Resilience of Belarus: ↓

### Situation

By the end of 2023, Belarus has got more sovereignty than it had at the beginning of the year – not because of action, inspiration, or positive agenda, but rather as a result of Ukraine’s military successes and miscalculated attempts of Moscow to meddle in internal Belarusian affairs, which culminates with a failed coup. Lukashenka and the Belarusian elites remain in power, albeit weakened and fragmented with much of the top elite still pro-Russian.

Repressions against the opposition continue. Parts of Belarusian society, while not enthusiastic, see Lukashenka as the only guarantor of sovereignty. Those who disagree join the ongoing wave of emigration.

### “War Factor”

Ukraine’s summer offensive is an unexpected success – the Russian army begins to disintegrate. It makes Putin decide to exert pressure on Belarus to join the war. Lukashenka resists, which incentivizes the Kremlin to conspire against the Belarusian ruler. It ends up in a (failed) coup d’état.

### Timeline

Russia is disgruntled over Lukashenka’s refusal to enter the war, and Putin secretly orders **a Russian-organized coup d’état in Minsk** in October, carried out by an obscure, previously unknown group. The coup fails due to intercepted intelligence as well as the elite’s consolidation around Lukashenka, which was underestimated by the Kremlin.

As a result of the coup, Lukashenka reinstates the non-nuclear status of Belarus, claiming he had been forced to “go nuclear” under foreign pressure, and promises pre-2021 military posture leading to a new opening in Belarus-Ukraine

relations in November. Through Ukraine’s mediation, Minsk convinces the EU/West to consider easing sanctions in exchange for promised release of political prisoners and new political reforms. However, there are no concrete plans to implement them – the West remains skeptical. By the end of the year, the relations within the elites, as well as Belarus-Russia relations, are still at a stalemate. Hence, Belarus maintains sovereignty, while Lukashenka and the political elites keep repressing the Belarusian society. Russia has very limited resources to exert pressure on Belarus.

### Political Situation and Stability of the Regime

After the political turmoil, Belarus has maintained its sovereignty, but all the power players have been weakened. The political system seems like an unstable, de-facto power-sharing arrangement. The power is shared between Lukashenka, who survived the Russian botched coup d’état, and parts of the security sector, which nevertheless remain generally pro-Russian. Both sides agree on continuing the domestic repressions. Stability hinges on keeping the opposition in prison. The coup has increased paranoia within the already fragmented elites. Attempts are made to rearrange the new power-sharing system, which pits institutions and groups of elites against each other.

### Society and Civil Society

Society is repressed, apathetic, and divided. Lukashenka is credited for keeping Belarus out of the war and surviving the coup, which increases his legitimacy in some parts of society. Belarus has maintained its sovereignty, which also helps rebuild Lukashenka’s legitimacy. Yet, the paranoia of the regime leads to an increase of repressions, especially against potential opponents of the regime. Independent media can be accessed only via VPNs, which are becoming more dif-

difficult to use. The economy remains stagnant, while emigration continues at a high rate.

### **Democratic Forces in Exile**

The democratic opposition outside of Belarus becomes more fragmented and marginalized and overall carries very little influence. They have even lost some support and empathy in Europe – by surviving the coup Lukashenka is again seen by many in and outside Belarus as a guarantor of sovereignty, even at the cost of democratic reforms. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and her team continue raising awareness about the repressions and lack of democratic developments, but their appeals are not followed up by any new actions in the West. By the end of the year, the forces in exile need to find ways to rebuild their legitimacy.

### **Belarus-Russia Relations**

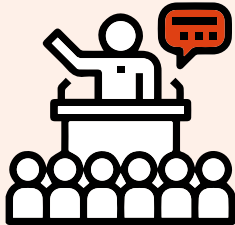
Relations between Belarus and Russia are functional, but under strain. Russia is disgruntled over the failed annexation but denies its involvement in the failed coup d'état. Russia continues its minimal economic support of Lukashenka's regime to maintain the pro-Russian geopolitical orientation of Belarus, and to use Belarus as a loophole to evade sanctions. Lukashenka distrusts Putin but cannot distance himself from Russia as there is little appetite to improve relations with the West. Both regimes are fragmented. Belarus announces Russian military withdrawal from Belarusian territory, but de facto Russian military presence remains. After the coup failure, Russian attention is diverted away from Belarus focusing on internal domestic politics. Russia switches to a new long-term approach, trying to rebuild its influence within Belarus via the elites around Lukashenka, most of whom are still pro-Russian.

### **Belarus-Ukraine Relations**

In response to the pro-Russian coup in Minsk, Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his team try to draw Belarus out of Russian influence. Ukraine lobbies Brussels and Washington to support the “pro-sovereignty” forces in the country (including Lukashenka) and ease sanctions against Belarus. After the coup, some Russian troops remain in Belarus, but their active engagement in the war from the Belarusian territory is highly unlikely due to Lukashenka's announcement of their impending withdrawal. This frees up Ukrainian forces to join in the counteroffensives against Russia as Ukraine continues to push Russia back to the 1991 borders. Kyiv calls on Minsk to follow through in its de-militarization declarations. In December, a delegation of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry visits Kyiv to symbolize a new opening. Parties agree on joint de-mining and de-militarizing of the Belarusian-Ukrainian border. Ukraine provides guarantees that those Belarusian nationals who are fighting on its territory against Russia will remain in Ukraine and not pose a threat to Lukashenka.

### **Belarus-EU Relations**

The EU takes a cautious “wait and see” approach. Their reactions to the changes are slow and delayed. The EU criticizes the coup attempt declaring that Russia should refrain from interfering in Belarusian affairs, pledging to continue its support for Belarusian sovereignty. The EU decides not to lift sanctions against Belarus, and only announces that it is ready to suspend some but not altogether rescind them. At the same time, the EU is less harsh in enforcing existing sanctions thanks in part to Ukraine's intervention on behalf of Minsk. Warsaw, Berlin, and Paris are divided on how to approach Lukashenka. Minsk invites the EU Ambassador to return to Belarus.



## “Big BY-ologue”

**Russian pressure on Belarus: low**  
**Resilience of Belarus: high**

After severe defeats in Ukraine, Russia presses Lukashenka to send Belarusian troops to Ukraine. He refuses and Russia removes him from power. Belarusian army enters the war, but it does not help: new defeats lead to inner turmoil in Russia. Belarusian society is mobilized against the war, and rational parts of Belarusian elites start a national dialogue with society.

🦢 “Black Swans”:

- Lukashenka is replaced from within by pro-Russian hard-liners backed by Moscow to have Belarus fully enter the war.
- Major successes of the Ukrainian army, including the liberation of Crimea, spark unrest in Russian regions and a split in Russian elites.
- The hard-liners in Minsk are in turn replaced by regime pragmatists who use Russia’s distraction to launch a national dialogue to save Belarus.

## “Big BY-alogue”

Russian pressure on Belarus: ↓  
Resilience of Belarus: ↑

### Situation

Lukashenka is removed from power by Russia-backed hard-liners in the Security Council after refusing to fully join the war when Ukraine started retaking Crimea. The subsequent engagement of the Belarusian army could not prevent Russia’s loss but would lead to Ukrainian counterattacks against Southern Belarus. After social upheavals and splits in the elites both in Russia and Belarus, a more pragmatic group takes over in Minsk.

What follows is the release of political prisoners and a broad national dialogue with pro-governmental organizations, independent NGOs, former political prisoners, and democratic forces. Political exiles, whose moral authority is now reinforced, enter into talks with the Belarusian government. Belarus’s national and civic awareness is growing. The Kremlin is side-lined, but it sees the talks in Minsk as “acceptable”, since they are controlled by the Belarusian regime.

### “War Factor”

The Ukrainian army starts retaking Crimea with new Western weaponry after the failure of Russia’s spring offensive. Pressed by China and India, Putin decides against using tactical nuclear weapons, instead pressuring Lukashenka into sending the Belarusian army into hostilities. Lukashenka, fearing destabilization of the power system and social panic, refuses to comply and Russia removes him from power. Belarus enters the war, but makes no military difference. Ukrainian army takes back Crimea and starts shelling military sites in Belarus, which makes rational parts of Belarusian elites arrest the post-Lukashenka rulers and start a national dialogue with society.

### Timeline

After Lukashenka refuses to order a general mobilization, **Russia backs a “palace coup” in Minsk** 🦩: Lukashenka resigns after “inexplicably” becoming very ill and the Security Council takes over making Prime Minister Halouchanka head of state, while key decisions are made by General Valfovich.

The Belarusian army attacks Ukraine but suffers severe defeats. Ukraine shells sites in Southern Belarus. The West reacts with new massive sanctions, including a full blockade of the EU border. The Belarusian economy faces unprecedented challenges. Some democratic forces call for protests, others for “active resistance” in Belarus.

After Ukraine retakes Crimea in early summer and the Kremlin wants to order a full mobilization, **ethnically non-Russian regions start revolting against Moscow** 🦩, which leads to open infighting within the elites. Thus, Russia is forced to focus on internal stabilization and can no longer exert influence over Belarus or support it economically.

The Belarusian regime cannot conceal thousands of Belarusian casualties, which leads to some protests and strikes at state-run factories, while resistance fighters attack Russian military units. **A pragmatic power group takes over and arrests Valfovich and Halouchanka** 🦩. They manage to split the society: resistance fighters are branded “traitors” while the “patriotic” civil society is invited to join a national dialogue. As a goodwill gesture, all political prisoners are released. The West opens the borders and lifts some sanctions against potash and oil industries. A roadmap for new presidential elections in 2024 is prepared before Christmas.



### **Political Situation and Stability of the Regime**

The ousting of Lukashenka from within by a pro-Kremlin group, which was itself replaced following the defeat of the Belarusian troops in Ukraine, destabilizes the regime significantly. For the first time in over 20 years, real fragmentations appear within the Belarusian elites, splitting them into two factions: pro-Russian hard-liners, mostly connected with the security sector, and “pragmatic patriots” who want to save the country. Since the pro-Russian faction is weakened morally and lacks material support from Russia, the pragmatists manage to initiate a national dialogue by including in it some “opposition” groups. This enables first steps of economic reopening toward the West.

### **Society and Civil Society**

A window of opportunity opens up for the civil society when the post-Lukashenka regime calls for an “inclusive” (in fact, only partially inclusive) national dialogue. Some exiled NGOs return to Belarus and join the national dialogue. Their activities revolve around rehabilitation of political prisoners and reform proposals. The more “radical” ones remain in exile and demand a full democratization without any compromise with the “bloody” regime. Belarusians are divided, the majority more concerned about bread-and-butter issues. According to an independent survey, 60% of respondents want economy to be the first priority for the new government.

### **Democratic Forces in Exile**

Upon Belarus’s entry into the war, the democratic forces call on Belarusians to take action in street protests, strikes, and armed resistance. While demonstrations are limited in number, “spontaneous” strikes at state-run enterprises become a strong factor. Resistance fighters go into action here and there, but the new interim president instead uses them to discredit the majority of democratic forces. He only invites hand-picked non-violent opposition groups and workers’ representatives to participate in the dialogue thus cementing a split in the democratic forces. While “radical” opposition groups reject any dialogue with the new regime, others join the negotiations and work out agreements on the release of political prisoners and new elections in 2024.

### **Belarus-Russia Relations**

The entry of the Belarusian armed forces into the war overstrained the ostentatious “brotherly unity” with Russia and could not prevent the imminent breakdown of the front. The overthrow of Valfovich seemingly went in parallel with the power struggles in Russia, but since the new ruler is perceived “pro-Russian”, there is no immediate backlash from the Kremlin. His partial reorientation toward the West, mainly for an economic reopening, and his negotiations with parts of the democratic opposition do raise some concerns in the Kremlin, but Russia has to focus its limited resources on “putting out the fire at home” and invites the Belarusian leadership to visit Moscow in January 2024.

### **Belarus-Ukraine Relations**

The bilateral relations hit a historic low with Belarus’s active entry into the war and subsequent defeat. All communication lines are cut, and Ukraine insists on new harsher sanctions for Belarus. Once Valfovich is gone and Belarusian troops retreat, Minsk announces the “strategic importance” of reconciliation with Ukraine. The Ukrainian government remains suspicious of the new Belarusian government but starts preliminary talks about security matters and demands reparations as well as trials for Belarusian “war criminals”. The Ukrainian public sentiment toward Belarus remains largely negative. Besides POW exchanges, no significant public steps are taken to normalize the relations or open the transit routes by the end of 2023.

### **Belarus-EU Relations**


The EU first announces massive new sanctions after Belarus fully joins the war. Later, the EU generally welcomes the release of political prisoners as a sign of good will and the start of the national dialogue, despite it excluding some major opposition groups. Some sanctions (against transit and potash export) are partially lifted to signal support. But some member states remain skeptical, especially the neighbors of Belarus, since they see the dialogue as an attempt of the regime to save itself rather than a real democratic transition. The new ruler is perceived too “pro-Russian”. Therefore, other sanctions remain in force while the EU waits for concrete results, especially the new presidential elections.



## “Union against Russia”

**Russian pressure on Belarus: high**  
**Resilience of Belarus: high**

Triggered by Ukrainian military advancement, the Kremlin intensifies its actions to increase Russian influence on Belarusian political structures and regional elites through financial backing ahead of upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections. Lukashenka uncovers this and starts restoring relations with the West to get financial support, maintain power, and increase societal support in Belarus. A Round Table with democratic forces is scheduled for 2024.

 “Black Swans”:

- The power bloc, remaining loyal to Lukashenka, reveals a conspiracy of Russia to orchestrate his removal in the course of elections in 2024 and 2025 through bribery and financial backing of political structures, regional elites and individuals in the power bloc.
- A gas tanker truck explodes at a tactical nuclear weapons storage facility under construction due to the carelessness of Russian personnel, causing casualties and damage to buildings.

## “Union against Russia”

Russian pressure on Belarus: ↑  
Resilience of Belarus: ↑

### Situation

After the Kremlin's plans to establish control over political institutions in Belarus and to replace Lukashenka by a puppet ruler by 2025 are disclosed, Lukashenka starts gradually reducing Russia's influence in Belarus by restoring relations with the West, mainly to regain economic ties and access to international financial markets. Moscow starts trade wars, suspends loans, and threatens to cut off gas and oil supplies to Belarus starting from 2024.

To meet the requirements of the West for a possible cooperation, Lukashenka frees some political prisoners and eases repressions against activists, while his main political opponents remain in custody. Some Western sanctions are suspended in response. A Round Table with democratic forces is scheduled for early 2024; democratic actors in exile show interest. The authorities however intend to keep the process of the national dialogue under their control.

### “War Factor”

Because of the Russian failures on the Ukrainian front Putin is afraid of “losing” Belarus as well, and that pushes him to strengthen Russia’s influence in Belarus by establishing full control over political structures and ideally replacing Lukashenka by a puppet president by 2025. When Lukashenka discovers these plans, he uses Russian military failures in Ukraine and the growing military threat to Belarus’s security to publicly distance himself from the close cooperation with Russia and re-establish relations with the West.

### Timeline

In June, a group of **security officers prepare a report for Lukashenka disclosing the Kremlin's plans to replace him by an “elected” puppet president in 2025** 🦉. The report documents

numerous cases of bribery and financial backing of political parties, regional elites, and power bloc officials. It seems like a pro-Russian network has its cells operating in the regions, while local elites, tied to Russia through loan programs with major enterprises, hope for decentralization through the integration of Russia and Belarus.

In fear of losing political control and power in Belarus, Lukashenka decides to make a geopolitical turnabout without publicly revealing the conspiracy. Coincidentally in July a **gas tanker truck explodes at a tactical nuclear weapons storage facility under construction** 🦉 due to the carelessness of Russian personnel, causing casualties and technical damage. Lukashenka uses this accident, as well as military failures of Russia, to publicly denounce close cooperation with Russia as a military and nuclear threat to Belarus, and puts on hold the deployment of Russian tactical nuclear weapons.

In August, he appeals to the West behind the scenes for financial support and asks to lift sanctions. The West wants him to release political prisoners, start a national dialogue, and stop the training exercises for the Russian troops. In September, some political prisoners, including the Nobel Prize winner Ales Bialiatski, are freed, repressions against political activists are minimized, while chief political opponents of Lukashenka remain in custody. Because of some “technical difficulties” Belarusian authorities announce disbandment of the existing military training camps, no new military contingents from Russia shall enter Belarus, and no attacks on Ukraine shall be carried out from the Belarusian territory. As a result, some Western sanctions are lifted in November. A Round Table with democratic forces is scheduled for the beginning of 2024, while local and parliamentary elections are

postponed. Russia starts trade wars with Belarus, suspends its loan programs, and threatens to cut off gas and oil supplies to Belarus starting from 2024.

### **Political Situation and Stability of the Regime**

It turns out that numerous local civil servants, members of pro-regime political parties (e.g., Belaya Rus Party) have had close ties and financial backing from Russia for years. They were promised managerial decentralization through the integration of Russia and Belarus. But the security bloc remains faithful to Lukashenka and denounces the local elites. Instead of an open confrontation, Lukashenka dials back the pro-Russian rhetoric in state-run media to turn public sentiment away from Russia. Disloyal public servants are persecuted quietly, mostly on corruption charges. The loyal elites prepare to become part of the state-controlled national dialogue.

### **Society and Civil Society**

Representatives of civil society apprehensively observe the change in the geopolitical narrative, but the release of some political prisoners and a gradual easing of repressions gives them hope. They restore their operations and communication channels with their target groups. Clandestinely, they increase cooperation with exiled structures, including the Coordination Council, in order to obtain financial support. However, their actions in Belarus are still fragmented. Belarusian society tries to understand the new limits of what is permissible.

### **Democratic Forces in Exile**

Democratic forces are partly divided on how to react on the new course. However, the United Cabinet shows readiness for a dialogue but insists on organizing new presidential elections as soon as possible. They ask the EU to gradually lift sanctions in exchange for concessions by Lukashenka and mediate in future negotiations with the regime to launch a national dialogue, e.g., by creating a special commission on Belarus. They build up their presence in independent Belarusian media. They also try to reconcile their positions in preparation for the Round Table scheduled for early 2024.

### **Belarus-Russia Relations**

Moscow does not react militarily to the geopolitical turnabout of Minsk, understanding the deep economic dependence of Belarus from Russia and not wishing to lose its last ally. Instead, it decides to pursue a long-term strategy to regain control over Belarus. It releases several new „documentaries” discrediting Lukashenka personally, but emphasizing the unity of Russian and Belarusian peoples. Moscow starts trade wars (e.g., on dairy, meat, oil products), shuts down transit of Belarusian potash via Russian railroads, suspends all loan programs, and threatens to stop gas and oil supplies in 2024. The Russian government develops plans to force Belarus into subordination by the use of military force and a fake referendum, which would make Belarus part of Russia.

### **Belarus-Ukraine Relations**

When Russia threatens to impose an economic blockade on Belarus, President Zelenskyy reminds that Ukraine is also facing existential threats, and encourages Belarusians to start the national dialogue to protect their sovereignty. He welcomes Lukashenka’s announcement about Belarus’s official withdrawal from the Russian war and termination of all training exercises for the Russian troops in Belarus. Ukraine signals its readiness to restore previous trade volumes with Belarus and maybe even supply Belarus with gas. From now on, Ukraine closely coordinates its policy toward Belarus (including gradual lifting of sanctions) with the EU and other Western partners.

### **Belarus-EU Relations**

To minimize Belarus’s involvement in Russia’s military actions and to prevent the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, the EU agrees to support Lukashenka in exchange for the release of political prisoners, easing of repressions, and initiating of a national dialogue. Some EU sanctions (e.g., SWIFT ban, sanctions against Belavia airline, freight companies, potash, timber, and metals) are suspended in November in the face of the Russian economic blockade, while an Economic Plan for Belarus is viewed as a distinct possibility following a successful national dialogue and new elections. Belarusian authorities, the EU, and democratic forces establish contact groups to start a Round Table in 2024.

# Chapter 3:

## Insights, Chances, Risks

### 3.1. Desirable Scenario

The experts have formulated the following desirable scenario regarding the Belarusian sovereignty by the end of 2023:

**Belarus's sovereignty is (partly) restored, or at least no further elements of it are lost compared to its current status.**

This can happen if the following **three goals** are achieved:

- There is no further integration with Russia; Belarusian government makes independent political decisions in as many areas as possible.
- Belarus has as diversified access to economic, financial, and diplomatic resources as possible.
- There is a basic consensus between the government and the people, including parts of civil society, about the political course of Belarus.

### 3.2. Insights, Chances, Risks

The following important insights, chances, and risks regarding the Belarusian sovereignty have been formulated by each scenario group. When formulating them, experts considered the above-mentioned desirable scenario and the three goals.

- Lukashenka / Belarusian Elites**
- Lukashenka's regime in Belarus is not stable.
  - Reaction of the Lukashenka regime to Russia's pressuring is not predictable / might lead both to an annexation of Belarus by Russia and to a national dialogue with the Belarusian society.
  - Russian pressure on Belarus might become unbearable and unacceptable to the Belarusian elites.
  - Russian influence in Belarus might not necessarily be visible to all (e.g., via road-maps of the Union State, or military cooperation): an underground pro-Russian network operating in the regions might as well be a powerful tool of influence (see scenario "Union against Russia").
  - Legitimacy of Lukashenka in Belarus may increase if he is credited for keeping Belarus out of the war or if he survives a Russia-organised coup.

- A Russian coup against Lukashenka, either successful or failed, may lead to a decrease of the Russian influence in Belarus.
- Economic support from Russia correlates with the loyalty of the Belarusian elites to the Kremlin.
- Belarusian elites might not see the West as a valid alternative to Russia.
- Regional elites might be interested in cooperating with Russia in hope of decentralization via integration of Belarus and Russia.
- An overstrained Russia, weakened by Western sanctions, could become unattractive to large parts of the Belarusian society, including elites.
- If Belarusian authorities (current or new) become less dependent on Russia, it would not necessarily lead to democratization in Belarus.
- A split in the Belarusian elites might consolidate groups interested in stronger ties with Russia.
- Strong pro-Russian orientation of the Belarusian elites might endanger a possible national dialogue in Belarus and undermine the Belarusian sovereignty.

### **Belarusian Democratic Forces**

- Open struggle of Lukashenka with Russia (e.g., a failed Russia-organized coup) may lead to an increase of Lukashenka's legitimacy and marginalization of democratic forces / decrease of their influence in and outside of Belarus.
- The EU and Belarusian democratic forces seem to be unprepared for an increase of Lukashenka's legitimacy via open conflicts with Russia.
- Russia's excessive pressure on Lukashenka may lead to a fragmentation of the Belarusian elites, which could motivate some of them to start negotiations with civil society and democratic forces.
- Readiness of Lukashenka to talk to democratic forces may split them; it can also increase the influence of the democratic forces that will have contacts / negotiations with Lukashenka.
- National dialogue in Belarus will not necessarily be an inclusive one (when only "moderate" democratic forces are invited, or the dialogue turns out to be an imitation).

### **War in Ukraine**

- Belarus entering the war against Ukraine can cause different consequences (e.g., fragmentation of Belarusian elites, change of the regime, or even start of a national dialogue).
- Military defeat of Russia in Ukraine does not guarantee a positive scenario for the Belarusian sovereignty – Russia might want to "annex" Belarus as a "compensation". But the weakened Russia might as well ease off its pressure on Lukashenka if Ukraine succeeds on the battlefield.
- Russia's defeat in the war against Ukraine could make the Belarusian elites reluctant to integrate with Russia.
- In case of Russian military losses, the perception of Russia in Belarus might change – both the elites and the society might no longer perceive it as a power factor to reckon with.

### **Western States**

- The EU's capacity to "save" the Belarusian sovereignty is limited.
- Any conflict between Belarus and Russia could reinforce the incentives to improve relations between Belarus and the West / Ukraine.
- Belarusian vulnerability to Russia might be used by the West as a window of opportunity to advocate for democratic values in Belarus.

- If Russia is unable to quickly implement the integration agreements, it would give time for the West to present an "attractive alternative" to the Belarusian elites and society.
- Belarusian sovereignty will not lose its importance for the West even if the integration process with Russia continues under Lukashenka's rule.
- The EU will most probably not be able to speak with one voice if Lukashenka opens up to the West; the EU might be divided and reluctant to get involved.

**Further**

- The prolongation of the status quo (no "black swans") can lead to an increasing dependence from Russia and, thus, to the loss of significant elements of the Belarusian sovereignty (see scenario "Russian Protectorate").
- After the regime change, the majority of people in Belarus might be too concerned with economic issues to be politically active.
- Resisting the plans to station Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus can unite the Belarusian state and society against Russia.
- Relations between Belarus and Ukraine can improve if the Lukashenka's regime publicly resists the Russian pressure to send the Belarusian army to the war.

# Chapter 4:

## Policy Recommendations

The experts have formulated the following desirable scenario regarding the Belarusian sovereignty by the end of 2023: **Belarus's sovereignty is (partly) restored, or at least no further elements of it are lost compared to its current status.**

Based on the above-listed insights, chances, and risks distilled from the scenarios, these are the three goals and recommendations to contribute to preserving the Belarusian sovereignty in the near future.

### Goal 1:

**There is no further integration with Russia; Belarusian government makes independent political decisions in as many areas as possible.**



**Attention!** The prolongation of the status quo (no “black swans”) can lead to an increasing dependence from Russia and, thus, to the loss of significant elements of the Belarusian sovereignty.



**Attention!** Military defeat of Russia in Ukraine does not guarantee a positive scenario for the Belarusian sovereignty – Russia might want to “annex” Belarus as a “compensation”. But such a defeat might as well ease off its pressure on Belarus, while the Belarusian elites would be reluctant to integrate with a weakened Russia.



**Attention!** Belarusian vulnerability to Russia might be used by the West as a window of opportunity to advocate for democratic values in Belarus.

### How to contribute to Goal 1?

#### EU / other Western Decision Makers

- Follow a **double track of contact** with democratic forces and regime diplomats / elites and do not break off communication channels with the regime in Minsk.
- In cooperation with the Belarusian democratic forces and expert community, elaborate proposals for a new EU-Belarus partnership (e.g. in energy supply, financial assistance, economic cooperation, nuclear and environmental policy, and regional development). They could be a **Contingency Action Plan** on lifting sanctions and an **Economic Plan for a Democratic Belarus** tied to concrete steps by the Belarusian government (e.g., releasing political prisoners, full political amnesty and/or other significant de-escalation steps).



- **Inform the Belarusian civil servants and the Belarusian society** about the above-mentioned plans to keep them in the loop about an alternative route for Belarus.
- Focus on **Belarus's independence as a strategic goal** and follow a policy of non-recognition of all treaties signed by Lukashenka that deprive Belarus of its sovereignty starting from the latest presidential elections in August 2020; rally support at the UN level / in global South.
- **Support Ukraine in the war against Russia** as much as possible – only a weakened Russia would potentially lose its grip on Belarus.

**Ukraine** ● Harmonize foreign policy toward Belarusian democratic forces and the Belarusian regime with the EU and other democratic countries' approaches; cooperate with Belarusian democratic forces as representatives of pro-democratic Belarusians.

**Ukraine / Lithuania / Poland** ● Revise the policy toward democratically minded Belarusians living in these countries to prevent any discrimination against them and thus improve the image of these countries among the pro-democratic parts of the Belarusian society.

**Pro-independence Members of the Belarusian Regime** ● Whenever possible, sabotage or subvert Russia's efforts to put Belarus under the Kremlin's control.

**Belarusian Democratic Forces** ● Strengthen a positive perception of Belarus as a sovereign European country in the minds of the international community (as opposed to a Russian puppet regime). In cooperation with the EU and Belarusian expert community, elaborate proposals for a new EU-Belarus partnership (see recommendations to the EU / other Western decision makers above).

**Belarusian Civil Society / Diaspora** ● Continue projects on strengthening the Belarusian identity.

**Belarusian Independent Media** ● Focus more on the integration talks between Belarus and Russia, showcase the negative economic, political, and social outlook of a deep integration for Belarus.  
● Focus on strengthening the Belarusian identity.

**Belarusian Business in Exile** ● Focus on building economic linkages with partners in the European democratic countries rather than in China or Russia.  
● Support initiatives, media resources and NGOs promoting the Belarusian identity, and thereby strengthen the country's independence.

**Belarusian and International Expert and Academic Community** ● Produce policy papers, reports, webinars etc. on costs and benefits of the Belarusian integration with Russia and Eurasian integration in general versus cooperation with the EU, as well as on the ways to preserve the sovereignty of Belarus.  
● In cooperation with the EU and the Belarusian democratic forces, elaborate proposals for a new EU-Belarus partnership (see recommendations to the EU / other Western decision makers above).

- International Media** ● Together with experts and academia, initiate a broad campaign to inform Western societies and decision makers about the importance of preserving Belarus as an independent state.
- International Donors** ● Support research projects studying costs and benefits of the Belarusian integration with Russia and Eurasian integration in general versus cooperation with the EU, as well as the ways to preserve the sovereignty of Belarus.  
● Support initiatives / projects / media focusing on and strengthening the Belarusian identity.
- Russian Opposition in Exile** ● Promote a narrative (internationally and in Russia) where Belarus is a sovereign nation and not an extension of Russia's territory.

## Goal 2: Belarus has as diversified access to economic, financial, and diplomatic resources as possible.



**Attention!** After the fall of the regime, the majority of people in Belarus might be too concerned with economic issues to be politically active.

### How to contribute to Goal 2?

- EU / other Western Decision Makers** ● Create a "green pass" system for unsanctioned Belarusian businesses who do not collaborate with the Belarusian regime or who had to (partly) relocate to the West. The aim is to help bona fide Belarusian companies avoid the "overcompliance" problems with EU banks, registration authorities, etc. Belarusian democratic forces can be invited as member of a vetting committee.  
● All the recommendations for the EU / other Western decision makers from Goal 1 also apply here.
- EBRD / World Bank / IMF** ● Support Belarusian businesses in exile.  
● Participate in the development of the above-mentioned Contingency Action Plan on lifting sanctions and/or the Economic Plan for a Democratic Belarus.
- Belarusian Democratic Forces** ● In cooperation with Belarusian and international experts, think of possible ways to reduce the economic dependence of Belarus on Russia. Promote these ideas actively among the Belarusian elites and society, as well as internationally.  
● Contribute to creating the above-mentioned "green pass" system for unsanctioned Belarusian businesses.

**Belarusian and International Expert and Academic Community**

- Elaborate alternative ways for gas and oil supply to Belarus.
- In cooperation with the EU and Belarusian democratic forces, elaborate proposals for a new EU-Belarus partnership (see recommendations to the EU / other Western decision makers above).

**International Donors**

- Support research projects studying alternative ways for gas and oil supply to Belarus, and the overall diversification of the Belarusian economy and foreign policy.

**Goal 3:**

**There is a basic consensus between the government and the people, including parts of civil society, about the political course of Belarus.**



**Attention!** Readiness of Lukashenka to talk to democratic forces may split them; it can also increase the influence of those parts of them that will have negotiations with the regime.



**Attention!** Russia's excessive pressure on Lukashenka may lead to a fragmentation of the Belarusian elites, which could motivate some of them to start negotiations with civil society and democratic forces.

**How to contribute to Goal 3?**

**EU / International Organizations**

- Make preparations (e.g., roadmaps) for the EU or other international organizations (e.g., OSCE) to serve as mediation platforms once a national dialogue in Belarus is initiated.

**Belarusian Democratic Forces**

- Elaborate a comprehensive strategy and a public campaign to raise funds from Belarusians at the grassroots level to enhance sustainability and transparency of democratic forces and create efficient feedback mechanisms.
- Prioritize **Belarusian sovereignty over a quick regime change** in the democratic agenda. This might lay the groundwork for communication with parts of Belarusian elites before and during the transition period and prepare both the democratic forces and the elites for sudden changes in the political course of the country.
- Generally, work on uniting Belarusians instead of splitting them. The sovereignty factor might unite the current pro- and anti-regime actors and parts of society.
- Develop communication strategies for Belarusians who are not pro-democratic.
- Develop communication strategies for Belarusian elites who are not ardently pro-Russian.
- Together with civil society, expert community, diaspora, businesses, and media, elaborate formats for cooperation between Belarusian authorities and society (see the following recommendation).

- Belarusian Civil Society / Expert Community / Diaspora / Business in Exile / Independent Media**
- Together with the democratic forces, elaborate **formats for cooperation between Belarusian authorities and (civil) society** to defend the Belarusian sovereignty. Such formats might include the participation of state elites who are skeptical about an alliance with Russia (e.g., Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, parts of security sector). The process could start with an open letter from representatives of the democratic forces to the authorities, suggesting a broad national dialogue on the sovereignty of Belarus.
- Belarusian and International Expert and Academic Community**
- Produce analytical materials on formats for cooperation between Belarusian authorities and (civil) society in Belarus.
  - Produce policy papers, reports, webinars, etc. on the ways to preserve Belarus's sovereignty.
- International Donors**
- Continue supporting the Belarusian civil society inside and outside Belarus, including Belarusian diaspora, taking into consideration the real needs and requests articulated by initiatives and activists themselves; think about the ways how to simplify grant eligibility criteria (e.g., financial statements and other documents).
  - Provide more financial aid and further support to Belarusian democratic forces in exile who apparently are underfunded and face significant security risks.
  - Support research on formats for cooperation between Belarusian authorities and (civil) society in Belarus; support such formats if they are initiated in the future.

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