



Belarus 2022:

THE 'BRIDGE' OR THE 'CORPSE ON THE ROAD' BETWEEN RUSSIA AND EUROPE?

Acknowledgements

Working Papers make DIIS researchers' and partners' work in progress available to readers prior to formal publication. They may include documentation which is not necessarily published elsewhere. DIIS Working Papers are published under the responsibility of the author alone.

Lizaveta Dubinka-Hushcha

Researcher at Copenhagen Business School and affiliated with the DIIS FSPS-projects in 2021.

Lisa.dubinka@gmail.com

DIIS WORKING PAPER 2022: 07

DIIS · Danish Institute for International Studies
Østbanegade 117, DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark

Tel: +45 32 69 87 87

E-mail: diis@diis.dk

www.diis.dk

ISBN 978-87-7236-085-0 (pdf)

DIIS publications can be downloaded free of charge from www.diis.dk

© Copenhagen 2022, the author and DIIS

THE 'BRIDGE' OR THE 'CORPSE ON THE ROAD' BETWEEN RUSSIA AND EUROPE?

Lizaveta Dubinka-Hushcha

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Introduction	2
Methodology	3
Belarus in the Russian geopolitical imagination	4
The key to Belarus' independence is in Kyiv	5
The 'Dogs of Europe', or why Belarus' foreign policy cannot be called 'balancing'	7
Fluctuations in the action space for Belarus' foreign policy 1994–2022	8
The strategic military situation around Belarus after August 2020	11
The role of China and the bigger picture	13
Belarus' Baltic ties	15
Future scenarios for Belarus	16
Scenario 1. Status quo: no transition of power, no deepening of integration	17
Scenario 2. The loss of sovereignty: no power transition, deep integration	17
Scenario 3. Power transition, deep integration	18
Scenario 4. Democratisation: transition of power, no deep integration	19
In lieu of a conclusion	20
References	23

ABSTRACT

Domestic repression and external autonomy of Belarus have developed in cyclical patterns since its independence. The country's narrowed action space that followed its elections in August 2020 has affected, not least, the security situation in the Baltic Sea region. Relations between Minsk and Kyiv being crucial, war events in Ukraine in 2022 have significantly played into this already complex picture. Following this analysis, the paper delineates four major scenarios for developments in and around Belarus.

INTRODUCTION

The presidential campaign of 2020 and the ensuing crisis triggered by electoral fraud, saw mass protests and violence and was a turning point in the domestic political process in Belarus. Finding himself widely vilified and in political isolation with his action space massively shrunken, Lukashenka began to pursue a foreign policy unilaterally oriented towards the East, and Belarus became hostage to the Russian military. Its territory is currently being forced into acting as a springboard in Russia's war against Ukraine.

Since 24 February 2022 Lukashenka has officially been denying the involvement of Belarus as a military foothold and rear-guard position for the Russian army in the war against Ukraine. This position is a backwash of the policy that was actively exercised by Belarusian authorities between 2008–2020, known as 'situational neutrality' and 'hedging'. Still, he is continuing to support Russia in the public sphere with strong rhetoric. In line with H. Mackinder's controversial Heartland Theory of Geopolitics¹ (which got a second birth in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union), if Russia is holding the key to Belarus, then Lukashenka is holding the matches to set the region on fire, if he admits direct involvement in the military conflict.

A significant deterioration and crisis in relations between Belarus and Ukraine has become one of the most difficult consequences of the war, consequences which are not only bilateral, but also regional. It has already triggered responses from the Baltic Sea states, with Poland and Lithuania allowing increased presence of the US military on their territory and Finland together with Sweden declaring an intention to join NATO

¹ Post-Soviet Russia has completely reconfigured Mackinder's original Heartland in order to match it to the historical-geopolitical spaces of the Russian state, and from his "pivot of history" imagery derived the conclusion that Russia has at all times been the absolute center of all world-historical development'. Bassin, M. & Aksenov, K. E. (2006) Mackinder and the Heartland Theory in Post-Soviet Geopolitical Discourse. *Geopolitics*. [Online] 11 (1), 99–118. P. 116.

as soon as this summer. The distance between the Danish island of Bornholm and the strategic intersection of Belarusian, Lithuanian and Polish borders is just 560 km – within the range of Russian Iskander missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

Long-term neglect by the expert and political circles of Europe of the importance of Belarus in the European security architecture has led to the country becoming a de facto military foothold and rear-guard position of the Russian army in the war against Ukraine.

As a military ally of Russia, its ‘neutral’ status raises dilemmas. Belarus has previously taken a cautious position regarding the recognition of the statuses of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk. Also, Minsk became a negotiating platform for the Normandy format, where the Minsk agreements were signed. This strategy of ‘hedging’ and situational neutrality was supported by expert diplomacy.

But after the elections in August 2020, the emphasis on the personal political interests of the dictator led to a partial loss of sovereignty within the framework of the Union State project (with Russia) which had been pushed actively in December 2019. In the autumn of 2021, the signed package on union ‘integration’ led to the institutionalisation of close coordination and cooperation between Russian and Belarusian law enforcement agencies. In particular, a new edition of the Military Doctrine of the Union State of Belarus was adopted, devoid of any intimation of hedging or situational neutrality.

In this situation, any attempt to re-actualise Lukashenka’s personal engagement in the future negotiation process towards peace with Ukraine only exacerbates the potential for conflict in the region. Just as with the Minsk agreements in 2014, which were imposed on Ukraine within the Normandy format, such ‘mediation’ is only possible in case of Ukrainian defeat, which would have direct consequences for Baltic security as well. This research paper will consider all these complex and interconnected levels of the structure of internal political, foreign policy and regional relations.

This paper seeks to answer the following question: how has the narrowed action space of Belarus that followed the elections in August 2020 affected the security situation in the Baltic Sea region? This is particularly relevant for the Baltic countries bordering Belarus and their neighbours in the Nordic and Baltic Sea region. The paper delineates four major scenarios for developments in and around Belarus.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis is based on 12 semi-structured group and individual interviews with diplomats, representatives of NGOs, politicians and acknowledged foreign and security policy experts from Denmark, Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and the US as well as representatives of the European Union. They are kept anonymous and confidential upon the request of the interviewees. It is necessary to underline that due to the political

scope of the project the interviewed diplomats or representatives of NGOs working with Belarus were most able to contribute with information without providing evaluations of the situation or expressing their own opinions.

The interviews were conducted in person as well as online via Zoom and other platforms. Notes and recordings were made with the permission of the interviewees, then transcribed, translated into English if necessary, and coded.

The interview guidelines were designed to reflect the overall structure of the paper. The difficulty with this project is that events rapidly unfolded as I wrote about them. There is no time to look back and reflect; in effect we are writing about a future that is happening now, and knowledge that feeds into our understanding of the whole picture is flooding in. Bearing this in mind, the methodology has been based on accumulating statistics and other quantitative data, conducting our own interviews, and following think-tank reports. Each time a new report is published, it provides an update to the situation and contributes to filling in pieces of the puzzle.

BELARUS IN THE RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATION

Empires inherently think and act geopolitically. The forefather of the Russian empire founded on the Russian geopolitical doctrine is undoubtedly Peter the Great, who secured Russia a 'window into Europe' by founding St. Petersburg in 1703. Shortly before this, Peter had conquered the Azov fortress, which opened the way to Crimea (lost again to the Turks in 1711).

Catherine the Great, in turn, continued this policy and expanded Russian territories further in both directions, taking over the Crimean peninsula and founding the city of Sevastopol in 1783, which has been regarded as Russia's most important naval base ever since. Azov was regained from the Turks during the Great Russo-Turkish War sealed in the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji (1774).

In the Baltic region, Catherine supported Denmark in order to secure an alliance against Sweden and benefitted a great deal from the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1797. As a result, the territories of Belarus and Ukraine became part of Russia, an empire stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and encompassing the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian confederation – previously a constitutional monarchy with a democratically elected parliament (the Seimas).

With Russian politics shaped as it was by these two 'Great' rulers, the security situation in the Baltic Sea was determined by the security situation in the Black Sea, and vice

versa. This geopolitical thinking not only continues to prevail in Russian political science, but is also dominant when it comes to designing a foreign policy doctrine.²

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian access to the Baltics was reduced but not entirely blocked because of 1) the remaining seaports of Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg within the Russian Federation and 2) the neutral status of Sweden and Finland who both joined the EU but not NATO. As for the Black Sea, the Sevastopol naval base on the Crimean Peninsula, which was within the territory of Ukraine, is regarded by Russia as an essential part of its glorious historical narrative in the same way as St. Petersburg is in the Baltics. It is not by chance that the founders of both St. Petersburg and Sevastopol are called 'Great' in Russian history. Russia is famous for attaching huge significance to symbolic historical dates, which usually serve as validations for its rulers. Russia is preparing to celebrate the 320-years jubilee of the founding of St. Petersburg and the 240-years jubilee of the founding of Sevastopol in 2023, with the aim of symbolising restored glory and the continuation of 'Peter and Catherine the Great geopolitics'. The role of Belarus in this equation is no longer that of an independent state serving as a bridge between East and West, but rather reminds one of the corpse lying in the middle of the bridge, straddling the international border, that was the key image of the famous Nordic Noir TV series 'Broen' ('The Bridge').

THE KEY TO BELARUS' INDEPENDENCE IS IN KYIV

Although Belarus became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991, it continued to be a 'blank spot' on the Danish political map until 2020³. To understand this paradox, how a country in Europe could remain a terra incognita, it is helpful to take a look at the history of its independence and recognition.

The one and only US president to visit Belarus since its independence was Bill Clinton, who spent six hours in Minsk on his way back from Moscow in 1993. He was known for his cordial relationship with Boris Yeltsin, and his visit to Belarus was not intended to rock this relationship. Unlike the former Baltic republics of the Soviet Union, the US was not interested in Belarus becoming pro-Western. Neither was it interested in investing massively in the Belarusian economy, even though it had a bigger potential for rapid economic growth than many other former Soviet republics. For the US, the major concern regarding Belarus was the withdrawal of the nuclear weapons stationed on its territory during Soviet times.

Trying to establish trust in the international arena as a newly independent state, Belarus chose a policy of neutrality and voluntary withdrawal of nuclear weapons from

² Bassin, M. & Aksenov, K. E. (2006) Mackinder and the Heartland Theory in Post-Soviet Geopolitical Discourse. *Geopolitics*. [Online] 11 (1), 99–118. P. 102.

³ Dubinka-Hushcha, L. & Mouritzen, H. (2021).

its territory, but it needed to rely on some sort of compensation for its future economic development. Upon the request of Belarusian diplomats during his brief 1993 visit to Minsk, Bill Clinton called Boris Yeltsin in the middle of negotiations and ensured some verbal guarantees that Belarus would receive subsidies in the form of cheaper oil and gas from Russia.⁴ The fact that this was not fixed in a formal agreement led to the structural economic dependency of Belarus on Russia that has endured ever since, alongside the cultural one inherited from Soviet times.⁵

The foreign policy of Belarus is known for its overall pro-Russian character tempered by balancing-like fluctuations towards the West in-between election periods. The main expression of this balancing, however, was in a friendly relationship with Ukraine, articulated in numerous assurances from Lukashenka's side that no attack on Ukraine would be launched from Belarusian territory. However, when the usual room for manoeuvre shrank due to the sanctions imposed after the mass protests that followed the August 2020 elections, balancing and even hedging became impossible. It is a known fact that after joint Russian–Belarusian military exercises a substantial number of Russian troops and weapons remained in Belarus and are presently being used extensively by the Russian army in the attack on Ukraine.

The situation after August 2020 was particular since the stakes had never been so high for Lukashenka, who was re-elected for a sixth term. The protests were unprecedented, and so too was the brutality of suppressing them. Experts are unanimous that had it not been for the moral, political, economic and military support of Russia, the protests would have succeeded in drawing the military to their side and changing the regime.

But why is Belarus so important for Russia and why has it been practically neglected by the West all this time? The war in Ukraine has shown that Belarus is an important space on the map of Europe, without which it would not be possible for Russia to carry out its offensive on the Central and Western parts of Ukraine, nor would it be possible for Russia to have a buffer between itself and the Baltic members of NATO surrounding the Kaliningrad region on the one hand, and bordering Belarus on the other.

It is in Ukraine's utmost interest to ensure that Belarus remains if not neutral, then at least a reluctant ally of Russia in this battle. An advisor to the Ukrainian president Mr Oleksij Arestovijtj, who has Belarusian roots himself, has urged Belarusians to resist helping the Russian military, and there have been cases of sabotage on Belarusian railways delaying the deployment of the Russian troops. According to him, Belarusian

⁴ Memoirs of Piatro Kravchanka, [Minister of Foreign Affairs](#) of Belarus from 1990 to 1994. Беларусь на распутье, или Правда о Беловежском соглашении : записки дипломата и политика / Петр Кравченко. - Москва : Время, 2006 (Екатеринбург : Уральский рабочий). - 455 с. Belarus at the crossroads, or the Truth about Belovezh agreement. Moscow, 2006.

⁵ Using the terminology of Dr Arkady Moshes from the Finish Institute of International Affairs. Presentation at the Danish Institute for International Studies on 16 November 2021.

soldiers will not fight on the Russian side and relying on them could turn out to be a big failure⁶.

There is another explanation to it, given by Maksimas Milta, an analyst at the Eastern European Study Centre (EESC): “[The current scenario] allows Lukashenko to have more choices, more excuses. He is creating a grey area here too. If he wants to, he can tell the West that he had no choice, that Russia oppressed him, but he did not send in troops. <...> If Russia won and Lukashenko had to explain himself to Putin, the Belarusian dictator could also say that he ‘had given Russia every opportunity, including infrastructural support, cover, and the possibility of securing the northern front’.⁷

Finally, the Belarusian army with its 45.000 of troops, out of which only 15.000 are combat-ready and less than 10.000 of them capable of fighting, is destined to become the ‘cannon fodder’ for the course which is not their own – the fact that makes them think more rationally. Therefore, it is rather Belarus’ territory that presents a springboard for attacking not only Ukraine, but potentially the Baltic countries as well. The distance from Belarus’ border to Kaliningrad is just 60 km, stretching between the territories of NATO members Poland and Lithuania. Further escalation of tensions can lead to full annexation of Belarus by Russia, if the latter decides that Belarus’ independence is dangerous for Russia’s existential interests.

The security of Europe has thus been in the hands of a small, overlooked nation, balancing between East and West, as an essential link between the Baltic and the Black seas. The key to Belarus’ action space lies in Kyiv today, which, in event of a Ukrainian victory, might unlock the biggest Russian nightmare of a European union stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea and including all the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth.

THE ‘DOGS OF EUROPE’⁸, OR WHY BELARUS’ FOREIGN POLICY CANNOT BE CALLED ‘BALANCING’

We can clearly see that the supposedly multi-vector policy, which was built since 2014, ended in 2020, and many contacts with the West were cut off. This refers to the imposition of sanctions (the joining of these sanctions by various countries including not only the EU but Canada, Britain, the United States, Switzerland and Serbia), but also

⁶ <https://www.unian.net/war/napadenie-belarusi-arestovich-zaveril-chto-belorusskie-voennosluzhashchie-ne-hotyat-voevat-protiv-ukrainy-novosti-vtorzheniya-rossii-na-ukrainu-11753137.html>

⁷ Belarusian army is too weak to get involved in Russia’s war in Ukraine. <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1654751/belarusian-army-is-too-weak-to-get-involved-in-russia-s-war-in-ukraine-analyst>

⁸ Title of the dystopian novel by the Belarusian writer Alhierd Bacharevich.

to the curtailment of various international projects within the country (e.g. the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development).

This entailed important consequences for relations to Ukraine, starting with informal statements by Belarus about the possibility of paying a visit to Sevastopol in Crimea, which would mean recognising it as Russian territory. Since 2014 Belarus had been balancing between Russia and a Ukraine that was remaining alliance-free but with a firm intention of joining NATO and the EU in the future.

It is fair to say that Belarus has never seriously considered membership in the EU, nor even a partnership agreement, which made the idea of 'balancing' rather problematic. Belarus has always been a loyal partner of Russia, to whom it has been bound by a myriad of integrational agreements, ranging from the defence and military alliance⁹ to the customs union and a parliament of the Union State.

Not recognising Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the Russo–Georgian War in 2008, nor the annexation of Crimea in 2014, gave Belarusian authorities some points as a neutral and independent state¹⁰. However, this room for manoeuvre was always within arm's length of coming under Russian control.

In a broader overview, we can see that Turkey, China and other Asian countries, have manifested a waning interest in Belarus as it has become progressively less stable as a result of sanctions. Concurrently, there had been a strong increase in cooperation with Russia in the military, political and economic spheres before the war against Ukraine.

FLUCTUATIONS IN THE ACTION SPACE FOR BELARUS' FOREIGN POLICY 1994–2022

Over the years Minsk's relations with the European Union and Russia have tended to develop in cycles¹¹. Domestically, these cycles are marked by increased political repression or relative liberalisation of the political regime. The present situation can be seen yet as another such cycle, but this time characterised by new circumstances, under which the options of all players involved are severely limited and the room for manoeuvre has dramatically decreased.

All the interviewees agreed that Belarus foreign policy development has followed a five-year cyclical pattern that has distinct phases, namely: elections > crisis > sanctions > parallel relations with Russia > relations with the West start to improve > elections >

⁹ The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) agreement was signed in 1992, two years before Lukashenka became president.

¹⁰ Dubinka, L. (2009) 'Casus Caucasus og danmarkisering af Hvideruslands udenrigspolitik'

¹¹ Kazharski (2021) 'Belarus and the EU after the 2020 awakening: limited room for manoeuvre?' Policy brief, Latvian Transatlantic Organisation. P. 4

new cycle. The only exception to this pattern was in 2015, when the elections ran more or less smoothly and did not entail a crisis of legitimacy (although the process of running these elections was no different from previous years).

Another example is the cycle following the elections in 2006. After two years of sanctions, the relationship between Belarus and the West began to improve. Non-recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008 accelerated the rapprochement. The cycle ended in 2010, when more severe sanctions were introduced after the elections. However, in 2013–2014 Belarus assumed a role as mediator in the Minsk agreements (or at least a location-provider) which was grudgingly approved by the Normandy format members. Non-recognition of Crimea gave the European politicians hope that Belarus had carved out increased room for manoeuvre in its relations with Russia and could play a constructive role in the region. Former foreign Minister of Denmark M. Lidegaard, who had a meeting with the foreign minister of Belarus V.V. Makei in December 2014 within the framework of the OSCE Ministerial Council events in Basel, points out that the EU countries, including Denmark, 'at that time were more positive towards the Belarus government than before the whole Crimean crisis came about, because they all found it quite important to see whether they could help build a positive development in Belarus instead of Putin taking all over. There were also signals from Lukashenka's side that he might be on a more positive pro-EU route'.¹²

These regular fluctuations are also reflected in the trade balance (Dubinka-Hushcha & Mouritzen 2021)¹³. Arkady Moshes points out that during the Lithuanian presidency of the EU Council in 2013, various countries had been seriously pushing to initiate a reset of relations with Lukashenka even before the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas¹⁴.

Each cycle usually starts with a political crisis and increasing isolation, followed by attempts to secure support from Russia by exchanging geopolitical loyalty for financial and political support. There are rounds of negotiations on deepening integration, whose purpose is to balance the external pressure from the West. In the middle phase, the West gets tired of the Belarusian crisis and the escalation slows down. Minsk starts to feel more confident and begins to circumvent agreements with Russia by not living up to the promises given at the beginning of the cycle. Russia applies more pressure, leading the Belarusian elites to seek counterbalance. As a result, the activation of the so-called 'distant arc', diplomatic and economic support from China, India, the Middle East and Latin America, takes place.

By 3rd–4th year of the cycle, the relations usually become more stable, i.e. as was the case in 2015–16. Russia reacts by testing various scenarios of how to prevent a volte-face

¹² Interview with Martin Lidegaard, January 2021.

¹³ Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Denmark and Belarus on February 4, 1992, the highest level of interaction has been at the level of foreign ministers. Niels Helveg Petersen was the only Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs who paid a visit to Minsk (November 1994); a reciprocal visit by a Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivan Antanovich to Denmark took place in February 1997.

¹⁴ Interview with Arkady Moshes, November 2021.

of Belarus towards the West, but there has never been a real danger that Belarus would do this. However, our interviewed experts agreed that these oscillations could become too wide one day, and this is likely to be the case in 2022¹⁵.

The main difference from the previous cycles is that the timeframe has been compressed, and nowadays there is no talk about a traditional 5-year cycle. The West is ready to maintain its position for a longer time and to increase its pressure through sanctions. It has also drawn certain conclusions from previous cycles and is familiar with all the tricks and shows of speculation over Belarusian sovereignty and independence. Before the Russian attack on Ukraine, the West was ready to cooperate with Russia in resolving this crisis, but not anymore.

Everybody seems to understand these differences apart from the Belarusian elites. They seem to believe that balancing will work just as it did before. On 15 April 2022 foreign minister Uladzimir Makei sent a letter to the EU representatives pledging for dialogue and asking for lifting of the sanctions¹⁶.

One of our interviewees predicted in November 2021 that Belarus would seek ways to normalise relations with the West by the middle of 2022. Meanwhile, Russia was pressing for a constitutional reform which was supposed to turn Belarus into a parliamentary republic as well as safeguard the Russian military presence. As a result, Lukashenka succeeded in conducting a constitutional referendum on 27 February but not entirely according to the Kremlin version of the constitutional reform. This, however, was compensated by his fully-fledged support of the so called 'special military operation' by Russia against Ukraine on 24 February.

According to Arseny Sivitsky (co-founder and director of 'Centre for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies' in Minsk), the politics of balancing would not work any longer and the new phase of deepening crisis was predicted to begin in February 2022¹⁷.

Absence of room for manoeuvre entails the risk of Belarus turning into a grey zone or ceasing to exist at all as an actor in international politics. This is not in the interests of either Putin or Lukashenka as long as Russia needs an ally to be used as a platform for peace negotiations. This explains the eagerness of Lukashenka to be included in the peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine¹⁸. On 3 June 2022 Putin pointed out the possibility of transporting Ukrainian grain to the ports of the Baltic states via Belarus, 'but to achieve this, the sanctions imposed on Belarus must be lifted'.¹⁹

¹⁵ Interview with Artsem Shraibman and Arkady Moshes in November 2021.

¹⁶ 'MFA comments on Makei's "secret" letter to EU diplomats'. Retrieved from <https://eng.belta.by/politics/view/mfa-comments-on-makeis-secret-letter-to-eu-diplomats-149795-2022/>

¹⁷ Interview with Arseny Sivitsky, October 2021.

¹⁸ 'Ukrainians agree to meet for talks with Russia on Belarus border'. The Times of Israel 27 February 2022.

¹⁹ 'Putin proposes ports under Russian control to transport Ukrainian grain'. Retrieved from The Global Frontier, June 3, 2022. <https://theglobalfrontier.com/putin-proposes-ports-under-russian-control-to-transport-ukrainian-grain/>

Threatening escalation is Lukashenka's traditional response, but in Autumn 2021 during the migration crisis Minsk lost control over escalation²⁰. Thus, the Belarusian authorities sought to use the crisis as an incentive to direct dialogue and negotiation.

For Russia the Belarusian crisis was an ultimate opportunity to expand its influence. Conditionality of support and pressure for constitutional reform of the presidential republic was supposed to provide more tools of influence that were not dependent on agreements with Lukashenka.²¹ A parliamentary form of government allows Russian control of the parliamentary majority, even in those countries where there is a conflict, such as in Georgia, where a pro-Russian party occupies the majority. The same mechanism was hoped for in Belarus as well as in Ukraine.

So, in other words, the Russian strategy in Belarus was a so-called export of 'controlled democracy'²² and a constant military presence with established bases, ready for the case of turnarounds in the internal situation – as in the Crimea scenario.

THE STRATEGIC MILITARY SITUATION AROUND BELARUS AFTER AUGUST 2020

In February 2022, just after the Russian attack on Ukraine, the constitutional referendum was held in Belarus against the background of joint Belarusian– Russian military exercises and a heavy presence of Russian troops on Belarusian territory. The joint military exercises have been lasting since elections in 2020.

The military exercises play a rather symbolic role. For example, Zapad-21 military training was, above all, a traditional way to demonstrate loyalty to Russia. It should be noted that there were two 'Zapads': one on the territory of Belarus and another one – strategic command and staff manoeuvres, which are also called Zapad – that extended further in time and space, involving an estimated 200,000 troops.

Experts say that due to the nature of the exercise, the capabilities tested and the focus on NATO, there have been recurring concerns that Zapad may mask a buildup of Russian troops whose real goal is to invade neighbouring countries – including Ukraine, Belarus or the Baltic states (Muzyka August 2021: 2).

²⁰ Interview with anonymous expert, October 2021.

²¹ For example, Lukashenka did not allow privatisation of industry by Russian companies in 2011; he refused to deploy the military base in 2015; and in December 2019 he resisted pressure to become part of Russia, a move which would have essentially made him redundant as a political leader.

²² Belarus' opposition leaders, including Sviatlana Cikhaneuskaya and Marya Kalesnikava were even appealing to the wisdom of Russia who, in their opinion, was a better democracy than Belarus and would never allow such atrocities towards its citizens. See, for example, 'Тихановская трижды за одно интервью отметила «мудрость» Путина и Москвы' ('Cikhaneuskaya pointed out "wisdom" of Putin and Moscow three times in one interview'). Retrieved from <https://meduza.io/news/2020/09/20/tihanovskaya-trizhdy-za-odno-intervyu-otmetila-mudrost-putina-i-moskvy>

The exercise scenario was, from the Russian side, not of a confrontational nature. Unlike the scenario of other joint exercises, this one reflected the propaganda narratives of autumn 2021. The plot of the scenario revolved around several propaganda theses: a coalition called 'Western' (Poland, Lithuania, the US and Ukraine) whereby Western countries are trying to organise a regime change. Lukashenka then orders planned exercises in the Grodno region, where active protests are taking place. Having failed to reach their goal, the Western countries resort to the instrument of military invasion, and so on. The 'Northern' coalition, according to the plot, was thus preparing to defend against aggression.

The second dimension when analysing Zapad-2021 is that of Russia's military occupation and confrontation with Ukraine. Pre-positioning equipment belonging to the 41st CAA at the Pogonovo training range south of Voronezh meant that with relatively little logistical effort, the Russian Armed Forces could mobilise up to 90,000 ground force personnel near Ukraine. The inclusion of four airborne divisions would push this figure up to around 110,000. These forces were sufficient to create one front-level grouping and conduct wide scale ground operations (Muzyka July 2021).

The exercises themselves did not show changes in the architecture of the military alliance. In response to the threat from the West, Belarus and the Russian Federation deploy a group of troops under the permanent command of the Belarusian side and ground forces of the Belarusian army plus the first tank army of the Russian Federation under the cover of a single regional air defence system (6th Army of the Air Force and Air Defence Force, all of these Belarusian). In wartime, command passes to the Belarusian side. Otherwise, the command changes on a rotational basis and is currently Belarusian.

Russian–Belarusian defence cooperation has significantly accelerated since the August 2020 Belarusian presidential elections, including the establishment of three new training centres (two in Russia and one in Belarus) that will further improve interoperability between Russian and Belarusian units (Muzyka, July 2021). In order to preserve strategic autonomy, Minsk is not going to surrender leadership in command of the allied military components. Belarus is now able to distance itself due to the procedure of decisions in the form of consensus. Minsk will not surrender this control, although the Russian Federation is making efforts to reform the military architecture. The main takeaway from the military exercise is that it shows that there were no major institutional changes in leadership. If until 2021 joint exercises overshadowed Belarus, now the opposite seems to be the case.²³

Although Minsk, obviously, tried to give them more weight, the Russian Federation emphasised that these joint exercises were insignificant and not the most important element in large-scale exercises and that they were not directed towards the West. Russia tried to distance itself from its ally and Belarus was losing its exclusive partner

²³ Muzyka, K. (2021b). Read more about the military structure in this report.

status. According to an interviewee, in the early 1990s the Belarusian forces were some of the most highly trained in Europe, and at that time Belarus provided its own security services which it converted into economic dividends. In the last six years the Russian Federation has actively eliminated this military dependence on Belarus and has groupings on the border with Belarus and Ukraine. In addition, there has been a revolution in military affairs: the development of hypersonic weapons systems, which makes it possible to knock last trump card from the hands of Belarusians. The Belarusian leadership was actively speculating:

Even before the elections, the Belarusian armed forces were effectively an extension of Russian forces stationed in the WMD, with both militaries integrated on the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. For example, in wartime, all Belarusian land and special forces will be subordinated to the Regional Grouping of Forces (RGF) headquarters commanded by a Russian general. Furthermore, Russia maintains a significant ground troop presence in the form of a motor rifle division deployed in Smolensk and Bryansk Oblasts (Muzyka July 2021).

THE ROLE OF CHINA AND THE BIGGER PICTURE

The meeting of Biden and Putin in Geneva 2021 led to some speculations about Russia's intention to find itself on the side of the West in the confrontation with China. It is known that Russian business elites used to oppose any prospect of becoming junior partners for China, but faced now with the limits of economic development without access to Western technology they are most likely to become so. The West, in turn, would have probably liked to involve the Russian Federation in the strategy of containing the PRC, to spread the economic costs, and make a move towards stabilisation in a number of regions, primarily the Middle East. Thus Biden returned to the deal with Iran and to the settlement of the Donbas conflict in order to begin to relocate US troops. Up until the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the US was in fact making constructive concessions to Russia in relation to Belarus and Ukraine. In the global sphere, increased competition with China is clearly evident in Central Asia, where the US' withdrawal from Afghanistan is leading to military integration processes of the Russian Federation and Central Asia. This also, of course, had implications for Belarus and narrowed the room for manoeuvre that it had had between 2014 and 2020, as the Russian threat perception had certainly changed.

The withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan potentially means more active cooperation between the Russian Federation and Central Asia (including a military base on the territory of Tajikistan). Russia could have real options for military and political integration along the same lines as already practiced in Armenia and Belarus. In Central Asia, anti-Chinese sentiments are high among their elites and the United States sees this

as a way to restrain China using the hands of the Russian Federation. However, as evidenced by statements at the recent CSTO summit, Russia has lost its previous positions in Central Asian countries. Russia is a toxic partner for them, says Temur Umarov from Carnegie Center, because they traditionally pursue multi-vector foreign policies and are afraid of falling under the Western sanctions due to the Russian war in Ukraine²⁴. At the summit, the presidents of the Central Asian states avoided the Ukrainian topic, while Lukashenka, against whom there are also sanctions due to the provision of territory to the Russian military for the invasion of Ukraine, called on the CSTO members to take a unified position against the West.²⁵

While discussing the Belarus' military cooperation with Russia, one may ask whether Russian and NATO military bases could coexist in Belarus in the same way as they do in some places in Central Asia? For the Russian Federation, it is unacceptable under current conditions. This does not mean that there is a complete taboo on the deployment of military installations. For example, this happened in Nagorno-Karabakh where, in addition to Russia, there were observers from Turkey which is a NATO country. The situation in Belarus is different, however, and if Belarus remained as a stable territory, Russia would be less willing to let any competitors in. But this does not mean that the country's foreign policy should be tied to the Russian Federation as is the case in Moldova and Armenia, especially if it is attracting investment projects. There has been a certain room for manoeuvre for CSTO member states that have been allowed to pursue liberal reforms, as in the case of Kazakhstan, provided that they are members of CSTO.

Security in the Baltic Sea Region is directly affected by the military cooperation between Belarus and Russia. Scenarios of an attack on the Baltic states from Belarusian or Russian territory have been discussed since 2014 and corresponding exercises have been taking place.

One of the interviewees pointed out while looking at the prehistory of the Crimean crisis, that there were allegedly suspicions that China had been planning a port and military infrastructure on the semi-peninsula, which caused anxieties on the Russian side. Although it was officially announced that the Russian action in Crimea was a response to NATO aspirations, it is possible that it could in fact rather have been China's strategic plans to include it into Belt and Road initiative that were seen as a source of risk. Russia's military intervention spoiled China's plans and led to a shift of attention to Belarus. But China has benefitted anyway because the Russian Federation found itself politically isolated and is bound to provide energy supplies to China that was playing the Russian Federation off against the West.

²⁴ Russia as a toxic partner and the allies' walking 'in a minefield'. Thoughts after the CSTO summit.
<https://rus.azattyq.org/a/csto-summit-in-moscow-russias-allies/31854842.html>

²⁵ Lukashenko urges Russia-led CSTO military alliance to unite against West.
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/lukashenko-urges-russia-led-csto-military-alliance-unite-against-west-2022-05-16/>

BELARUS' BALTIC TIES

The name of Belarus points at its historical belonging to the Baltic Sea region. In fact, the word «Baltic» itself is translated as «white». According to the concept of the Baltic ethnic sublayer, the origin of Belarusians is from the Slavonic tribes who came to the territories inhabited then by the Baltic peoples and mixed with them, giving birth to the Belarusian ethnos.²⁶

In spite of close historical ties during the times of the Great Duchy of Lithuania and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Belarus and the Baltic states chose different strategic alliances after gaining independence from Russia. The relations with neighbours have not been simple and unambiguous, but pragmatic economic interests have often coexisted alongside mutual distrust and opposing views on human rights and democracy.

Lithuania had traditionally pursued the most proactive policy, offering itself as an expert on interaction with post-Soviet states and striving to formulate a basic framework and priorities for working with Minsk at the EU level during periods of both 'frozen' and 'warm' relations. In the years running up to the crisis Latvia managed to construct for itself the image of a politically 'convenient' European neighbour and a more balanced business partner, thanks to restrained public rhetoric resulting from economic pragmatism. Out of three Baltic states Estonia was the least connected with Belarus and pursued a relatively passive and often situational position on Belarusian issues. Fewer economic risks allowed Estonia to be more active and critical of the human rights' situation in Belarus when needed, while major approaches to interaction with Belarus were shaped by Lithuania and Latvia who shared a border with Belarus. Common to all three countries has been concern over joint military exercises and close military-political cooperation between Belarus and Russia. This has been seen by the Baltic states as a threat to regional security and as establishing the conditions for a possible aggression against the Baltic countries using the territory of Belarus.

It is through the territory of Belarus that, in the event of a hypothetical military conflict between Russia and NATO, Moscow would be able to 'cut off' Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia from the rest of the Alliance by blocking the Suwalki corridor. Such an offensive is regarded by many experts as one of the most likely scenarios in the event of a full-fledged military clash. RAND estimates that it would take Russian troops between 36–60 hours to take control of the Baltic region. This makes the issue of Belarus an existential one for the entire region. In many respects, it is for this reason that the Baltic countries have been so active in shaping the European policy on Belarus.

²⁶ Dubinka, L. (2009) 'Casus Caucasus og danmarkisering af Hvideruslands udenrigspolitik', *Udenrigs* 2. S. 97.

Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland demonstrated a common position after the 2020 elections which resulted in mass protests brutally suppressed by the authorities. On 13 August the presidents of all four countries adopted a joint declaration to resolve the post-election crisis. It included three demands to the Belarusian authorities: i) stop the use of force; ii) release all political prisoners; and iii) start a dialogue with civil society. There was also a proposal to hold a 'forum for national reconciliation'. The four states declared their readiness 'to mediate with the aim of achieving a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Belarus and strengthening its independence and sovereignty.' In the event of an escalation of repression, they threatened to impose sanctions.

Lukashenka declined the offers of mediation and dialogue with the protesters, and his rhetoric became increasingly hostile towards Belarus' neighbours. Impromptu military exercises held near the border with Lithuania and the increased concentration of armed forces triggered restrictive measures against Belarusian officials and security personnel at the national levels before the EU sanctions were introduced. In parallel to this, humanitarian and medical assistance was provided to the victims of repression fleeing the country.

FUTURE SCENARIOS FOR BELARUS

Based on the preceding analysis as well as interviews and literature, this section provides a critical overview of various scenarios for Belarus. It is important to stress that none of those scenarios were taking the outbreak of war in Ukraine into account. While the research was based on interdisciplinary methods, combining historical and anthropological knowledge with political science framework, most predictions were grounded on either rough historical analogies, abstract models or even conspiracy theories.

Two major criteria (axes) were chosen to illustrate the possible future scenarios outlined: the domestic situation in Belarus and the level of integration with Russia.

The first criterion is based on the initial demand of the opposition to hold new elections which will allegedly lead to a transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy and the consequences thereof.

The second criterion represents Belarus' structural dependence on Russia, which grows deeper each time Belarus' relations with the West get worse after elections. In essence, it denotes the fluctuations in Belarus foreign policy and its external room for manoeuvre.

This simplified approach illustrates the interplay between domestic and foreign policy factors, but does not take into account the occurrence of so called 'black swans' – the unpredictable events that drastically can change the whole setup. The war in Ukraine became such a factor.

In order to get a more nuanced picture, we also asked the interviewees which of the geopolitical transformations known from other cases were likely to happen in Belarus (e.g. crimeasation, abkhaziasation, or armeniasation).

Scenario 1. Status quo: no transition of power, no deepening of integration

This scenario presupposes that Lukashenka stays in power and preserves enough room for manoeuvre to withstand a deeper integration with Russia, which could de facto mean becoming part of the union state with common currency, joint administration and perhaps one head of state. It does not exclude the likelihood of Belarus turning into a satellite state to the Russian Federation, while preserving its seat in the UN.

Lack of transition and democratic reforms on the one hand, and continuous repressions of the population followed by sanctions will have a negative impact on the economy, business and intellectual capital. The highly educated and skilled groups of the population are leaving the country for a better life.

The foreign policy of Belarus towards the EU is focused on convincing partners that Lukashenka is an uncontested interlocutor in Belarus, calling for the resumption of pragmatic relations. Minsk tries to identify potential 'weak links' in the EU, which could lobby for a gradual return to the policy of involvement. For this Belarus uses economic incentives and threats (trade in ports, access to the Russian market, cheap electricity, nationalisation and/or tax prosecution of Baltic capital, etc.). Yet it is doubtful that anyone would like to go into dialogue with it after all that happened.

An important factor in this and any other scenario is that since 2020 the society of Belarus has acquired its own, independent from the authorities, political subjectivity in the eyes of the democratic countries. They will continue to provide assistance to civil society in Belarus, while relations with the authorities will be kept at a technical and low political level.

Scenario 2. The loss of sovereignty: no power transition, deep integration

The difference between this scenario and the previous one is that breaking off relations with the West forces Lukashenka to make more serious concessions to Russia, including the creation of supranational institutions of the Union State and the gradual alignment with the Russian financial, tax, customs, judicial, and industrial regulations. Belarus renounces its previous position on the Crimea issue and declares its readiness to recognise the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The parties agree to create a Russian military base in Belarus and a permanent contingent of Russian troops on the border with the EU. Russia provides economic assistance to the Belarusian authorities, helps in the fight against disloyal population groups, and actively supports Lukashenka in the international arena, defending the legality and the legitimacy of his rule.

This scenario is close to 'abkhaziasation', in which Russia has more interest after 2020 when Lukashenka has full control of the inner situation, but is entirely dependent on Russian support externally. Lukashenka's political power in Belarus is ensured only

thanks to the support of Russia. He is forced to coordinate even the smallest decisions on issues of domestic and foreign policy with Moscow.

Meanwhile there is a consensus in the European Union that Belarus is not a truly sovereign state and that Lukashenka is not free in his decisions. Lithuania together with other Baltic countries will lobby for tough EU sanctions against Moscow in case of their 'annexation of Belarus'. In response to the alarm about the increased security threats in the Suwalki Corridor area, NATO and the United States increase their military presence in the region.

A return to the policy of dialogue is much more burdened with 'harsh preliminary conditions'. For instance, the Baltic states want guarantees that this will not be the same game that Minsk played earlier. According to all our interviewees, a return to the previous format of mutual relations is hardly possible. At the same time, as European diplomats admit, there is no final plan for the event that Lukashenka surrenders Belarus' sovereignty to Moscow.

Scenario 3. Power transition, deep integration

In this scenario Lukashenka loses power in Belarus, yielding to the pro-Russian forces, which begin the process of Belarusian–Russian unification. International recognition of the legitimacy of integration depends on how these forces come to rule the country – whether as a result of a nomenklatura coup with the help of Moscow or as a result of democratic elections. In the event of a nomenklatura coup, the new forces will simply find themselves in the same situation as Lukashenka himself would be in under scenario 2.

The international community demands elections for the authorities to acquire a popular mandate and legitimacy. Western countries try to influence the development of events in Belarus through putting pressure on Russia and support of civil society. There is a high degree of probability that mass protests resume, presenting the new authorities with a choice: to use the same degree of violence against people as under Lukashenka, or to make concessions.

If new elections are announced in Belarus, the Baltic countries demand the release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners as well as their participation in the election campaign. Sviatlana Cikhanouskaya and other opposition politicians return to Minsk. If the OSCE/ODIHR recognise the free, inclusive and democratic nature of the elections, even a victory of Russia-oriented politicians will lead to better relations between the Baltic states and Belarus. According to the experts interviewed, the current requirements for Belarus are not geopolitical. Therefore, an orientation toward Russia 'will not in itself serve as an obstacle to cooperation'. According to an interview with a Lithuanian diplomat, 'Lithuania has no expectations that in the coming years Belarus will move towards the EU and NATO'. Furthermore, during the previous round of negotiations on deepening the integration of Belarus and Russia,

...the authorities of the Baltic states supported the sovereignty and independence of Belarus because it was obvious that Lukashenka did not consult with his people on this issue. If new authorities do have such a popular mandate, it will change the position of Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn (same interview).

However, it can be assumed that certain problems and conflict situations may still arise: in particular, 'if Belarus decides to recognise the independence of South Ossetia, Abkhazia and the legality of the annexation of Crimea'. Lithuania will continue to insist on the closure of the Astravets nuclear plant, and this will hinder the normalisation of relations with Belarus.

Under such a scenario, the interviewed experts do not see any new serious threats, primarily because today's Belarus is considered very pro-Russian already. Additional tension is possible if Moscow uses the more closely integrated territory of Belarus as a springboard for threatening manoeuvres near NATO's borders, which could be regarded by the Baltic neighbours as a provocation assisted by Minsk.

Scenario 4. Democratisation: transition of power, no deep integration

Such a scenario presupposes the elimination of the existing system of power in Belarus and, most likely, a new truly independent foreign policy. Lukashenka is removed from power, and a democratically elected government takes his place. Tens of thousands of emigrants return to the country, political prisoners are released, repressive laws and practices are abolished and stopped. This leads to a radical improvement in relations between Belarus and the Western world in all directions. The Baltic countries become the main supporters of a speedy Euro-Atlantic integration of Minsk (contrary to the position of certain large EU countries), providing it with economic, humanitarian and other international assistance, and facilitating visa procedures for Belarusians. The change in the political climate serves as an incentive for intensifying economic cooperation, attracting European investments and technical support to Belarus. Lithuania changes its foreign policy and extends financial services to Belarus towards a solution to the issue of the Belarusian nuclear power plant. The new authorities of Belarus reject some of the agreements concluded under Lukashenka with Russia, and negotiations on integration and building a union state become impossible. For Russia, this is the most disadvantageous scenario, in which it loses many of its instruments of influence over the situation in Belarus. Moscow prepares for revenge and begins to pursue a tough policy towards Belarus. Gas, oil, food and other 'wars' break out between the two countries. Russia tries to artificially stir up social contradictions on national, linguistic, foreign policy and other grounds. The likelihood of hybrid special operations or even a direct military invasion increases (both at the time of the fall of Lukashenka and later under the new government). However, according to all the experts interviewed, the likelihood of military intervention by Russia is low if the removal of Lukashenka from office is not accompanied by an uprising similar to the events of 2014 in Ukraine.

Given the energy security problems caused by the deteriorating relations with Russia and the huge potential financial costs, Minsk is unlikely to abandon the already launched nuclear power plant project. This means that a certain negative issue in relations with Lithuania will remain. At the same time, due to the improvement in the atmosphere of dialogue and increase in the level of mutual trust, new forms of cooperation become possible in terms of European and Lithuanian inspections to ensure the safety of nuclear power plants.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

A peculiar specificity of the current situation is that the Belarusian authorities are unable to significantly reduce the degree of repression and make concessions to civil society in the foreseeable future, precisely because Lukashenka has been unable to stabilise the domestic political situation despite the unprecedented scale and duration of the campaign to persecute his opponents. The incident of the forced landing of Ryanair's Athens–Vilnius flight internationalised the internal Belarusian political crisis and is viewed by Lithuania as an act of aggression against it. All these factors block the possibilities for the resumption of some kind of constructive dialogue with the Baltic partners and further deepen the dependence of Belarus on Russia. The Baltic states can no longer allow a return to pragmatic cooperation with Lukashenka without a transformation of the political regime in Belarus. A so-called 'armenianization' is impossible in Belarus because it has a border with Europe. Interviewees agree that Belarus will have some kind of scenario of its own. For a while now there will be an internal political scenario known as reaction, which follows after the defeat of any revolution, when everything will be trampled into the ground, the suppression lasts for a while and then everything starts all over again.

To what extent Belarus will have a different foreign policy will very much depend on the situation in Russia and a possible transit in 2024 or 2030, when a candidate from the post-Putin generation will be the successor. Turning Belarus into a 'North Korea' is possible, if a similar development takes place in Russia as a result of the Ukrainian war.²⁷

Inspired by a definition drawn from physics, Zbigniew Brzezinski called the area of the former Soviet Union a 'black hole', signifying a source of instability and future conflict²⁸. Belarus used to be a 'blank spot' on the Danish political map, which turned into a 'hot spot' and then a 'reprehensible spot' after the elections in August 2020²⁹ and

²⁷ It is important to note, nevertheless, that countries like North Korea grow where there has never been an internet.

²⁸ Brzezinski, Z. (1997). *The grand chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives*. New York, NY: BasicBooks.

²⁹ Dubinka-Hushcha & Mouritzen 2021.

later its affiliation with the Russian military aggression in Ukraine. Matthew Kott from Uppsala University has called Belarus a kind of ‘bellwether of Europe’³⁰ – a metaphor which has proved to be particularly accurate in the light of the Russo–Ukrainian war on the edge, at the time of writing, of becoming a conflict between Russia and NATO.

Back in December 2021 the brewing conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the Belarus-assisted migration crisis were making the beginning of 2022 a most unpredictable and uncertain time. Are we now on the brink of a new conflict in Europe? All this has implications for Danish security in the Baltic Sea region and beyond.

This paper has dealt with developments after the Belarus elections in August 2020, when relations between ‘independent’ Belarus and the EU have reached their lowest ever. All attempts to resolve the crisis by diplomatic means have been largely fruitless, leading to a shrunken freedom of manoeuvre for all and the discarding of the previous policy of hedging and situational neutrality for Belarus.

Scholars in Russia and Belarus have often asked me, with irony in their voices, whether Denmark has a foreign policy, as in their understanding small states are entirely deprived of power and influence in world affairs and therefore not worthy of attention. However, there still appears to be continuity and consensus in the foreign policy of Denmark as a small state, whereas Belarus is experiencing a deep crisis of sovereignty. The Danish model is proof that a small country can preserve its independence even when surrounded by big and powerful neighbours, and that there are alternative sources of power which are both efficient and ethical.

In the period between 2015 and 2019 there was a light at the end of the tunnel for Belarus, when relations with the EU and other Western countries were improving; it was seen as only a matter of time before a fully-fledged US embassy would re-open in Minsk. Russian gas supplies were to be partly substituted by those from Norway, it was to become easier for Belarusians to obtain Schengen visas, and citizens of the EU were already visiting Belarus visa-free for up to 30 days. Liberalisation of the economy, belarusisation of the cultural sphere, the celebration of 100 years of the Belarusian People’s Republic in 2018, Belarusian diplomats attending the reburial of anti-Russian rebel Kastus’ Kalinouski in Vilnius in 2019. Swedish and Finnish prime ministers visiting Belarus in 2019 and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s visit to Minsk in February 2020 all seem like distant history in the first half of 2022.

So-called ‘black swans’ have been frequent visitors to Belarus recently, starting with COVID-19 and followed by international lockdowns in March 2020 which exposed the inherent maladies of the outdated regime (which prescribed curing the virus with vodka and tractors). This triggered memories of how the Soviet state treated radiation

³⁰ Speech at the 14th Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe (CBSE) ‘Rights and Recognition in the Baltic Context’ 1–4 September 2021, Uppsala.

after Chernobyl – something that Belarusians experienced all too well and are still suffering the consequences of. In the meantime, stocking up in case of a nuclear accident, the Danish Ministry of Health has ordered additional supplies of two million iodine tablets.

REFERENCES

- Dubinka, L. (2009) 'Casus Caucasus og danmarkisering af Hvideruslands udenrigspolitik', *Udenrigs* 2: 97–103.
- Dubinka-Hushcha, L., Kläbel Weisdorf, A. & Koefoed, O. (2011) 'A Dialogical Approach to the Danish Foreign Policy'. In Paulsen, M., Koefoed, O. & Kromann, J. (eds.) *Learning from the Other: Intercultural Metalogues*. Århus University: NSU Press, 168–74; 180–89.
- Dubinka-Hushcha, L. & Mouritzen, H. (2021) 'From Belarus as a white spot to its perception as a "shameful spot"'. In *Baltic and Nordic Responses to the 2020 Post-Election Crisis in Belarus*. Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 6–9.
- Dubinka-Hushcha, L. (2021a) 'Belarus tager hidtil usete demokratitruende midler i brug'. 8 June 2021. Available at: <https://www.altinget.dk/eu/artikel/organisation-belarus-tager-hidtil-usete-demokratitruende-midler-i-brug>
- Dubinka-Hushcha, L. (2021b) 'Lukasjenko. Flykappingen i Minsk gør os alle til gidsler'. 6 June 2021. Available at: <https://avisendanmark.dk/artikel/debat-flykappingen-i-minsk-g%C3%B8r-os-alle-til-gidsler>
- Dubinka-Hushcha, L. (2021c) 'Europakortet skal skrives om: Efter 30 år ændrer Danmark kontroversielt landenavn', *Berlingske*, 18.03.2021. Interview to Emil Rottbøll. Available at: <https://rb.gy/cpuvdu>
- Dryndova, O. et al. (2021) 'Four scenarios for Belarus by the end of 2022'. SSOAR policy paper, November 2021. Available at: <https://cutt.ly/dGsBub2>
- Kazharski, A. (2021) 'Belarus and the EU after the 2020 awakening: limited room for maneuver?' Policy brief, Latvian Transatlantic Organisation.
- Moshes, A. (2016). 'Lukashenka's "drift to the West": why Moscow should not be worried'. PONARS Policy Memo, 440. Washington DC: Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia.
- Muzyka, K. (2021a) 'Defending the union'. International Center for Defence and Security, Tallinn, December 2021. Available at: [ICDS Analysis Defending the Union Konrad Muzyka December 2021.pdf](https://www.icds.org/analysis/defending-the-union-konrad-muzyka-december-2021.pdf)

Muzyka, K. (2021b) 'The Belarusian armed forces. Structures, capabilities, and defence relations with Russia'. International Center for Defence and Security, Tallinn, August 2021. Available at: <https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Belarusian-Armed-Forces.pdf>

Muzyka, K. (2021c) '[Russia Goes to War: Exercises, Signaling, War Scares, and Military Confrontations](https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-goes-war-exercises-signaling-war-scares-and-military-confrontations)'. Center for Strategic and International Studies (csis.org) 8 July 2021. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-goes-war-exercises-signaling-war-scares-and-military-confrontations>

Nizhnikau, R. & Moshes, A. (2020) 'Belarus in search of a new foreign policy: why is it so difficult?' Danish Foreign Policy Review 2020: 48–72.

Post-2020 Belarus: Security and Defence Implications for the Baltic States, Poland, and NATO. <https://www.liia.lv/en/publications/post-2020-belarus-security-and-defence-implications-for-the-baltic-states>

Russian Influences in Belarus. European Values Center for Security Policy Report 2021. Available at: <https://europeanvalues.cz/en/mapping-research-russian-influence-in-belarus/>