

EXPERT ASSESSMENTS

BELARUS CHANGE TRACKER

June–August 2023

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WHAT IS THE BELARUS CHANGE TRACKER

Belarus is going through the most turbulent period since its independence. The war in Ukraine¹ and the Belarusian authorities' complicity in Russia's aggression, combined with the country's still unresolved internal political crisis of 2020, have created a "perfect storm". Features of the turbulent situation include ongoing widescale repressions, unprecedented foreign sanctions and the severance of economic relations with Western partners, international isolation and intensified social polarisation within the country. The situation poses many new challenges for researchers. It is increasingly difficult to identify sustainable and relatively long-term trends through the mists of a controlled information environment and the extreme volatility in economics, politics and public sentiment, as well as in regional security issues.

To address these challenges, our five Belarusian experts produce a quarterly analytical report, the Belarus Change Tracker. The idea behind this product is to record and analyse more general trends in place of observers' usual focus on individual events and the noise of daily information. The team includes two political analysts, two sociologists and economist. They are **Pavel Slunkin**, visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations; **Artyom Shraibman**, founder of the Sense Analytics consultancy; **Philipp Bikanau**, independent sociologist; **Henadz Korshunau**, programme director of Belaruskaya Akademia and senior analyst at the Center for New Ideas; **Lev Lvovski**, academic director at BEROCC.

The analytical "zest" of our report is an exclusive quarterly opinion poll that enables us to record shifts in public opinion across different segments of Belarusian society². The authors would like to thank Press Club Belarus for contributing to the dissemination of its results.

¹ While the authors use various designations of the Russian-Ukrainian war, they are all unanimous in interpreting this conflict as Russia's war against Ukraine

² See "Technical Annex" for a detailed description of the sampling and data collection method.

SUMMARY

The armed march of the Wagner Group on Moscow was the key event in the reporting period in foreign politics, leading to a drastic increase in Russia's military presence in Belarus and contributing to the militarisation of the entire region and an escalation of tensions at the country's borders. The prospect of Belarus's total isolation from its Western neighbours seems closer than ever. After more than a year of contemplation, the European Union resolved differences among its member states regarding sanctions against Belarus and adopted a new restrictive package. The authorities suggest that Belarusian citizens compensate for the consequences of ruptured relations with Western neighbours by deepening ties with Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine. The ongoing process of Belarus's de-sovereignisation was reflected for the first time in OSCE documents, which referred to a "soft annexation" of Belarus by Russia.

In the summer, the authorities began preparations for the 2024/2025 electoral cycle. Alyaksandr Lukashenka and his subordinates made wide use of classical populist discourse. The "cleansing" of political parties has been almost finished, depriving the opposition of the last legal opportunities for full participation in the election campaign. Militarisation also continued: the regime established new units of special forces to fight government opponents, appointed former security officers to civil positions, and scaled up training of regular reservists. The trends in the political opposition were contradictory: the split in BYPOL and the loss of another "minister" from Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Cabinet were compensated for by regular dialogue and growing openness to cooperation between the Warsaw-Vilnius and Kyiv centres of the democratic movement.

The key trends in Belarus's foreign economic relations during the summer were an intensification of sanctions activity against it, the continued outflow of foreign businesses, and the search for new ways and pretexts for receiving Russian assistance.

The Belarusian economy's recovery continued during the reporting period, but the first signs of economic overheating due to excessive stimulation emerged as well. Despite this, the government continued to maintain a loose monetary policy while concurrently ensuring administrative price controls. The trend towards nationalisation of the economy has also continued: the state hurts private businesses and helps public ones.

Public opinion in Belarus remains polarized. Segments of both the opponents and supporters of the current regime continue to hold contrasting views on the political and economic situation in the country, as well as Belarusian foreign policy and the Russian's war against Ukraine. There is still a high level of tense mutual disagreement. In terms of dynamics, over the reporting period, the slow growth in the number of those who trust the regime, which was recorded in winter and spring, stopped. The survey results also indicate that the deployment of nuclear weapons and the Wagner Group in Belarus did not find understanding in public opinion: even among staunch supporters of the state, these actions are approved by less than half.

The main trends concerning the operation of the repressive system have continued, and the leaders of law enforcement agencies confirm they have no intention of ending repressions. Control over the public sphere is tightening, and besides demonstrating "repentance" and condemning "extremism", people are now required to approve of the regime's policy in public if they wish to avoid punishment. The authorities are taking measures to create a new form of serfdom — the personal subordination of certain social or professional groups. In the cultural and historical sphere, the main enemy is any manifestation of the Belarusian identity and its main symbol, Kastus Kalinousky. The activist boom in diasporas, which began in the spring, maintains its scale for now, focusing on political prisoners.

1 FOREIGN POLICY

The armed march of the Wagner Group on Moscow was the key event in the reporting period in foreign politics, leading to a drastic increase in Russia's military presence in Belarus and contributing to the militarisation of the entire region and an escalation of tensions at the country's borders. The prospect of Belarus's total isolation from its Western neighbours seems closer than ever. After more than a year of contemplation, the European Union resolved differences among its member states regarding sanctions against Belarus and adopted a new restrictive package. The authorities suggest that Belarusian citizens compensate for the consequences of ruptured relations with Western neighbours by deepening ties with Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine. The ongoing process of Belarus's de-sovereignisation was reflected for the first time in OSCE documents, which referred to a "soft annexation" of Belarus by Russia.

EXPANSION OF RUSSIA'S MILITARY PRESENCE

The armed Wagner mutiny reversed a trend of gradually declining Russian troop numbers in Belarus observed in recent months. Throughout the summer, Russia had been gradually transferring conscripts who had completed training in Belarus away from the country without sending any new recruits. However, the deployment of the Wagner Group mercenaries in Belarus after the mutiny drastically increased the Russian military presence in the country. It was also the first time that new armed military groups arriving in Belarus did not formally and directly report to either Russian or Belarusian military commands. At the time of writing, the Wagner PMC is known to have handed over its heavy weapons to the Russian Ministry of Defence, received infrastructure for temporary accommodation in Belarus and registered two legal entities there, one for educational services and another for real estate management³. After the death of Wagner's head, Yevgeny Prigozhin, it is most likely that the Wagner Group will be disbanded or placed under the command of the Russian government along with all its resources. In any case, the Belarusian authorities will have to adapt to Moscow's requests rather than have a say in the matter.

The expansion of the Russian military presence, however, was not limited to the Wagner PMC's deployment. During the reporting period, a military investigative department of the Investigative Committee of Russia began to operate in Belarus⁴. Its opening was justified by the "deployment of units of the Ministry of Defence of Russia" in Belarus. Russia has similar Investigative Committee offices in the countries where it has military bases or forces stationed: Armenia, Tajikistan, and the unrecognised 'states' of South Ossetia and Transnistria.

The Belarusian side continued to artificially create tension at its western borders. In July, Alyaksandr Lukashenka threatened Poland with the Wagner Group mercenaries leaving Belarus and "going on a tour to Warsaw and Rzeszów"⁵. In the same month, command and staff exercises took place in the Hrodna region near Belarus's borders with Lithuania and Poland⁶. The summer also saw an increase in the number of controlled attacks, organised by the regime, by migrants attempting to cross the Latvian border. In the first eight months of 2023, more than 6,000 attempts to cross the border from the Belarusian side were prevented, while during the whole of last year, there were 5,286 attempts to

³ [«Вагнер» займется образованием](#) // НВ, август 2023

⁴ [Следственный комитет России создал военный следственный отдел в Беларуси](#) // Медиазона, июнь 2023

⁵ [Лукашенко заявил, что сдерживает вагнеровцев от экскурсии в Варшаву и Жешув](#) // Наша Нива, июль 2023

⁶ [Беларусь проводит учения вблизи границ с Польшей и Литвой](#) // Зеркало, август 2023

cross. 27 July saw the highest daily number of illegal crossing attempts at the Belarusian-Polish border since the culmination of the migration crisis in November 2021⁷.

MILITARISATION OF THE REGION

Belarus's above-mentioned actions, combined with processes taking place inside the country, are forcing neighbouring states to re-evaluate military risks and security threats constantly. As a consequence of the ongoing militarisation of Belarus, including the deployment of Wagner mercenaries, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia have taken several decisions regarding security and the protection of their state borders.

Poland has strengthened its border with Belarus by sending an additional 2,000 troops. The total number of Polish soldiers in the immediate vicinity of the Belarusian-Polish border is now about 10,000, with 4,000 directly engaged in protecting the state border and 6,000 in reserve⁸. The Polish government also announced the creation of a new military unit to be stationed 35 kilometres away from Belarus⁹ and called on the United States to deploy American nuclear weapons in Poland under the NATO joint nuclear missions programme¹⁰.

As a response to the increasing tension at the borders, among other things, Lithuania closed the Šumskas (Losha) and Tverečius (Vidzy) checkpoints on the border with Belarus¹¹. In June, Lithuania and Germany held joint exercises near the Belarusian-Lithuanian border, claiming that their main goal was to prepare for the defence of NATO countries from aggression¹². In August, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Armed Forces of Lithuania held joint exercises to prepare for challenges arising from migration and hybrid threats¹³. Besides military decisions, Vilnius is also taking other measures. During the summer, Lithuania intensified checks on Belarusian citizens to tackle "threats to national security". As a result, some Belarusians were denied Lithuanian residence permits, or existing permits were cancelled¹⁴. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda continues to lobby for the harmonisation of restrictions on Russian and Belarusian citizens, a proposal earlier blocked by the Lithuanian Seimas¹⁵.

Latvia, meanwhile, has increased its number of border guards to strengthen the state border¹⁶. The country's border service requested additional support from the Armed Forces and the police. Latvia held control exercises in August 2023¹⁷ and announced comprehensive national defence exercises "Namejs 2023" for September-October, which will involve 8,500 troops¹⁸.

⁷ Коршунов Г. «Рисковать Лукашенко уже не хочет». Что говорят летние данные о кризисе на границах // Центр новых идей, август 2023

⁸ Польша разместит на границе с Беларусью 10 тысяч военных, рассматривается вопрос о закрытии всех пунктов пропуска // Зеркало, август 2023

⁹ Польша создаст новую воинскую часть вблизи границы с Беларусью // reform.by, август 2023

¹⁰ Польша хочет разместить на своей территории ядерное оружие в ответ на размещение российского в Беларуси // Наша Нива, июнь 2023

¹¹ Как изменилась ситуация на границе после закрытия Литвой двух пунктов пропуска // Наша Нива, август 2023

¹² Германия и Литва проводят учения в 20 км от Беларуси // DW, июнь 2023

¹³ Литва проведет учения на границе с Беларусью // Европейская правда, август 2023

¹⁴ Литва признала 910 граждан Беларуси угрозой национальной безопасности // Белсат, август 2023

¹⁵ Президент Литвы Гитанас Науседа снова призвал уравнивать ограничения для белорусов и россиян // Новая Газета. Балтия, июль 2023

¹⁶ «Шуток не будет». Премьер Латвии: мобилизация на белорусской границе – упреждающая акция // Delfi, август 2023

¹⁷ В Даугавпилсе, рядом с белорусской границей, начинаются военные учения; будет шумно, но жителей просят не беспокоиться // Наша Нива, август 2023

¹⁸ Армия направила больше солдат для помощи Погранохране у восточной границы // Латвийские общественные СМИ, август 2023

As well as actions at the national level, the Baltic states and Poland are discussing a complete and simultaneous closure of their borders with Belarus¹⁹. At the moment, the parties are agreeing on technical details for implementing a full border closure. Prigozhin's death did not change these plans. The authorities of Poland²⁰ and Lithuania²¹ claim that the risk level has not decreased and may have become even higher following his death. Three years after the rigged presidential election, the Belarusian authorities have brought the prospect of the country's total isolation along its western border closer than ever.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME TO SUBSTITUTE FOR LOSSES IN THE WEST

The authorities have advised Belarusian citizens to compensate for the negative consequences of the rupture of relations with Western neighbours by deepening their ties with the Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine. As transport and logistical conditions for travelling to the European Union deteriorate, Belarusians have been presented with the opportunity of bus trips to occupied Crimea, located in the war zone. The Intercars company has launched a number of routes from Belarusian cities to the peninsula. The bus ride takes about 40 hours²².

The Belarusian authorities have also offered an alternative for business. Belarusian companies have been given the opportunity to make use of the seaport in Mariupol, occupied and 90% destroyed by Russia. One Belarusian enterprise has already started exporting grain through the port²³. The Belarusian ambassador to Russia, Dzmitry Krutoi, had a discussion with the occupation administration of the Donetsk region (DPR) regarding “the development of trade and economic cooperation in construction and agriculture” and even signed a communique “on expanding partnership”²⁴. A delegation from the occupied region, headed by the so-called chairman of the DPR government Yevgeny Solntsev, paid a working visit to Belarus in August. During the visit, the delegation signed documents on cooperation with a number of Belarusian companies, including Mogilevliftmash²⁵.

Instead of supporting Belarusian students to learn at Western universities, the Belarusian Ministry of Education is considering cooperation with educational institutions in the occupied Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk and Luhansk regions. First Deputy Minister of Education of Belarus Aliaksandr Bakhnovich admits that “the infrastructure has been destroyed and universities are not functioning to their full extent there,” but he is nevertheless determined to “resume the practice of joint conferences, R&D and student exchanges.”²⁶ Aleh Ramanau, the head of the pro-government party “Belaya Rus”, found another “opportunity” for Belarusian schoolchildren: they were offered a trip to the international children's centre “Artek”²⁷, located in occupied Crimea and subjected to shelling on a regular basis. “Artek” is on the US sanctions list for facilitating the illegal removal of Ukrainian children from the occupied territories²⁸.

¹⁹ [Страны Балтии и Польша в конце августа обсудят полное закрытие границ с Беларусью](#) // Зеркало, август 2023

²⁰ [Премьер Польши уверен, что ЧВК «Вагнер» останется угрозой для соседей Беларуси](#) // Наша Нива, август 2023

²¹ [Гибель Пригожина мало что меняет в вопросах безопасности Литвы – Науседа](#) // Еврорадио, август 2023

²² [Intercars запустил прямые автобусные рейсы в Крым](#) // Наша Нива, июнь 2023

²³ [Первая компания из Беларуси начала экспорт зерна через порт оккупированного Мариуполя](#) // Зеркало, июнь 2023

²⁴ [Посол Беларуси в России подписал соглашение о расширении партнерства с самопровозглашенной ДНР](#) // Зеркало, июнь 2023

²⁵ [Самопровозглашенная ДНР и «Могилевлифтмаш» подписали соглашение о сотрудничестве](#) // Зеркало, август 2023

²⁶ [Минобразования Беларуси может начать сотрудничать с оккупированными регионами Украины](#) // Зеркало, июнь 2023

²⁷ [Белорусские дети поедут в «Артек» в Крыму](#) // Наша Нива, июнь 2023

²⁸ [США ввели санкции против «Артека» и матери Рамзана Кадырова](#) // Радио Свобода, август 2023

COMPROMISE ON NEW EU SANCTIONS

In response to the dire situation in Belarus, EU countries have, after more than a year, managed to agree on another package of sanctions²⁹. The new restrictions do not threaten macroeconomic stability in Belarus (see Section 4). However, the most fundamental fact remains that, despite a months-long campaign waged by a number of states for the lifting of sanctions from the Belarusian potash industry and expanding them to other industries instead, all previously-adopted EU sanctions are still in force. Spain, currently holding the presidency of the EU, played a key role in reaching the compromise agreement, as did Poland. To defend its tough position on the inadmissibility of sanctions relief for Belarus, Warsaw blocked the signing of the Post-Cotonou agreement which is important for countries of the Global South. Poland agreed to lift its veto in exchange for the EU's refusal to ease the sanctions on Belarusian potash. The compromise, however, made the new sanctions package significantly less restrictive. The EU postponed the idea of sanctions relief for potash and tied it to the situation in the world food market³⁰.

As well as the EU, the United Kingdom twice adopted new sanctions against Belarus during the reporting period. Six additional companies were subjected to sanctions, as well as imports of gold, cement, wood and rubber from Belarus and exports of banknotes, machines, goods, technologies and materials that can be used to produce chemical and biological weapons to Belarus³¹. Another nine states (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, North Macedonia, Ukraine, Montenegro and Switzerland) have joined the above-mentioned EU sanctions package³².

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has adopted a resolution on the application of measures under Article 33 of the ILO Constitution to Belarus³³. The ILO called on the international community to reconsider relations with the Belarusian authorities. This decision is remarkable because such measures had previously only been used only against the Myanmar authorities, in 2000.

BELARUS ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS' AGENDAS

The Belarusian issue remains on the agenda of international organisations. During the reporting period, they adopted a number of important documents on Belarusian problems. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution “on specific challenges for Belarusians in exile.” The document concerns the support to Belarusians and their relatives, assistance to Belarusian non-governmental organisations in exile, issuance of passports and visas, the possibility of unblocking the bank accounts of Belarusian journalists in Ukraine, and the preservation and development of Belarusian culture and language in diaspora communities³⁴.

For the first time, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has documented the processes of de-sovereignisation of Belarus due to expanding Russian control over it. In its declaration on the results of the annual session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, it described these processes as a “soft annexation” of Belarus by Russia. In total, Belarus is mentioned in the final document 64 times³⁵. The declaration raises the issues of political prisoners, repression against dissidents, the desecration

²⁹ ЕС ввел новые санкции против Беларуси // Настоящее Время, август 2023

³⁰ Подробности переговоров привел в своей рассылке Wider Europe журналист «Радио Свобода» Рикард Йозвяк.

³¹ Великобритания расширила санкции против Беларуси // Зеркало, август 2023

³² Еще восемь стран присоединились к новому пакету санкций ЕС в отношении режима Лукашенко // Наша Нива, август 2023

³³ МОТ поддержала резолюцию по Беларуси // reform.by, июнь 2023

³⁴ Недискриминация, легализация, сохранение белорусской культуры: ПАСЕ приняла резолюцию о белорусах в изгнании // Весна, июнь 2023

³⁵ ПА ОБСЕ признала «мягкую аннексию» Беларуси Россией // Зеркало, июль 2023

of Polish soldiers' graves, the deployment of the Wagner Group to a base in Belarus and the abduction of Ukrainian children.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's deputy in the United Transitional Cabinet, Pavel Latushka, provided the Ministry of Internal Affairs with materials in evidence of the involvement of Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the forcible transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus³⁶. Latushka previously handed over similar documents to members and relevant committees of the European Parliament. In July, the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs published a report calling on EU institutions and EU member states to take all necessary steps to ensure criminal prosecution of Belarusian political and military leaders responsible for crimes against humanity and genocide³⁷. The report also calls on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue an arrest warrant for Lukashenka. However, so far this call cannot be considered the official position of the European Parliament, since at the moment the report has been approved only at the level of the relevant committee.

For the first time in history, representatives of Belarus took part in events at a NATO summit. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's team held a number of events dedicated to Belarusian issues within the NATO summit in Vilnius³⁸. Tsikhanouskaya had a brief meeting with US President Joe Biden, who mentioned Belarusians' struggle for freedom in his speech during a working visit to Lithuania.

³⁶ «Мощный удар левой рукой». Латуско рассказал о подвигах с документами против Лукашенко для Международного уголовного суда в Гааге // Зеркало, июнь 2023

³⁷ Belarus: MEPs alarmed that Russia is suffocating its neighbour's identity // News. European Parliament, июль 2023

³⁸ Итоги работы Офиса Светланы Тихановской 10-16 июля 2023 // Светлана Тихановская, июль 2023

2 DOMESTIC POLITICS

In the summer, the authorities began preparations for the 2024/2025 electoral cycle. Alyaksandr Lukashenka and his subordinates made wide use of classical populist discourse. The “cleansing” of political parties has been almost finished, depriving the opposition of the last legal opportunities for full participation in the election campaign. Militarisation also continued: the regime established new units of special forces to fight government opponents, appointed former security officers to civil positions, and scaled up training of regular reservists. The trends in the political opposition were contradictory: the split in BYPOL and the loss of another “minister” from Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Cabinet were compensated for by regular dialogue and growing openness to cooperation between the Warsaw-Vilnius and Kyiv centres of the democratic movement.

THE AUTHORITIES START THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN WITH CLASSICAL POPULISM

During the summer, the authorities at all levels, from Alyaksandr Lukashenka down to television propagandists, began intensively exploiting anti-elitist, anti-bureaucratic discourse, sometimes even openly trying to play the role of the opposition. Since Lukashenka started talking about preparing the system for the 2024/2025 electoral cycle at the same time, one may conclude that this is how the authorities are trying to convey an image of being “the people's defenders” ahead of the election.

On 19 June, at a meeting with the head of the Central Electoral Committee Ihar Karpenka, Lukashenka said that it was time to start preparing for the 2024 election³⁹. On 16 June, he threatened to dismiss the head of his administration Ihar Serhiayenka⁴⁰, and on 22 June, the same threat was made about Prime Minister Raman Halouchanka⁴¹. In both cases, the threats were not preceded by any obvious failures by these two senior officials; Lukashenka's statements were rather intended to show people how he keeps the bureaucrats on their toes. At the end of July, Lukashenka requested that Serhiayenka and Natallia Kachanava, the head of the Council of the Republic, “mobilise people” before the elect⁴².

While Lukashenka was threatening to fire Halouchanka and Serhiayenka, the head of the pro-government party “Belaya Rus” Aleh Ramanau and propagandist Ryhor Azaronak visited rural shops. They assessed the variety of goods on sale and blamed local officials and retail chains for the problems they detected. Azaronak did not hide the fact that the authorities were trying to take over the agenda that had brought opposition bloggers like Siarhei Tsikhanouski to public attention in the past. This means that the authorities intend to turn around the grassroots socio-economic discontent and construct a traditional populist discourse about authorities who care for the people, contrasting them with greedy businessmen and local officials who do not care for the common people.

In mid-July, Natallia Kachanava visited rural shops with a similar goal of helping to construct a narrative about state concern for ordinary people⁴³. Other officials and MPs later followed her

³⁹ [Лукашенко обсудил с главой ЦИК подготовку к электоральной кампании 2024 года](#) // Белта, июнь 2023

⁴⁰ [Лукашенко провел совещание по вопросам совершенствования кадровой политики](#) // Белта, июнь 2023

⁴¹ [Лукашенко - правительству: выполните задачи - ордена, провалите - уходите в отставку](#) // Белта, июнь 2023

⁴² [Встреча с Председателем Совета Республики Натальей Кочановой и Главой Администрации Президента Игорем Сергеенко](#) // Президент Республики Беларусь, июль 2023

⁴³ [Кочанова сходилa в сельский магазин и удивилась. Похоже, что она делает это нечасто](#) // Зеркало, июль 2023

example⁴⁴. In August, Lukashenka himself participated in the construction of this narrative by having lunch with machine operators in front of TV cameras⁴⁵.

It's not that the Belarusian authorities haven't engaged in populism before, but the number of actions taken during the summer suggests that this marks the beginning of the election campaign. Doing this within the populist discourse represents an independent new trend.

RINGFENCING POWER: CLEANSING THE POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM

By the end of the summer, the authorities almost completed the transformation of the party system in Belarus. As a result of the re-registration requirements, there are now only four political parties, all pro-government: "Belaya Rus", the Communist Party, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Republican Party of Labour and Justice. All other parties – there were fifteen beforehand – have either been liquidated already or are in the process of liquidation.

The elimination of oppositional parties is an element of the general trend of ringfencing of the Belarusian political field and removing any legal opportunities for political competition. The absence of opposition parties in the 2024 election means that, for the first time in the history of the Belarusian parliamentary elections, there may be no opposition candidates on the ballots at all. Previously, candidates were nominated by opposition parties under a simplified procedure (without collecting 1,000 signatures) in almost all districts, and sometimes there were even several opposition candidates per district. The latest re-registration process means that the opposition is deprived, even in theory, of several weeks of authorised campaigning, such as street pickets and addressing voters on TV and radio.

In terms of the political party system's design, this brings the Belarusian autocracy closer to most of the former and existing communist dictatorships (e.g. cold-war era Poland, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, China, or North Korea) and the regimes in a number of Central Asian countries. In this model, only parties loyal to authorities can exist. There is one dominant party and several satellite parties existing around them to imitate pluralism through an insignificant representation of these satellites in legislative bodies.

MILITARISATION: NEW SPECIAL FORCE UNITS, PEOPLE'S MILITIA AND A SECURITY OFFICER HEADING THE HIGH TECH PARK

On 17 July, Lukashenka signed the law "On People's Militia", which started the process of forming a new localised military unit⁴⁶. Training sessions for territorial defence members and the newly created militia units have reportedly taken place in the Salihorsk and Polatsk districts. The goal is to create units of armed volunteers who will help the police during a state of emergency and martial law. According to officials, these people will store weapons on a permanent basis⁴⁷.

In August, the government changed its procedures regulating military training⁴⁸. The introduced amendments also fit into the trend of militarisation. Reservist training will last 60 days instead of 35, it will be possible to call up reservists for training more often than before (for reserve officers, sessions may become 5-10 times more frequent). The pool of reservists who may be called up has also

⁴⁴ Депутат сходил в сельский магазин вслед за Кочановой, которая удивилась дефициту товаров. Парламентарий же не могла нарадоваться выбору // Зеркало, июль 2023

⁴⁵ «Ну как кормят? Ничего?» Лукашенко пообедал в поле с комбайнерами и обсудил с ними новую технику // Белта, август 2023

⁴⁶ Подписан Закон «О народном ополчении» // Президент Республики Беларусь, июль 2023

⁴⁷ Добровольцы белорусского народного ополчения смогут хранить оружие дома // Зеркало, 2023

⁴⁸ За сборы военнообязанных будет отвечать не только Минобороны, но и КГБ. И это далеко не самое тревожное в измененном положении // Зеркало, август 2023

expanded as it now includes people not fully fit for military service for health reasons. Training sessions will now be organised by the KGB as well as the military enlistment offices.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs, represented by Deputy Minister Mikalai Karpiankou, continues to create new units, which, as the security force officers admit, are required to fight opponents of the authorities⁴⁹. New special forces units of the internal troops (“Shtorm” in Brest, “Taifun” in Hrodna and “Buran” in Homel) were formally created in May, and recruitment was apparently completed by July. In mid-July, Karpiankou attended the first training sessions of these units. Those recruited are contractors from the reserve with at least 3-5 years of service in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The number of units is unknown. In December 2022, similar special forces units, “Rys” and “Smerch”, were created in Minsk. The sixth and seventh units are expected to be created in Mahiliou and Vitsebsk.

The expansion of special forces' control over civilian life was also reflected in the appointment of a former KGB operative, Aliaksandr Bazanau, as the head of the Hi-Tech Park (announced in early August)⁵⁰. The High-Tech Park (HTP), like the whole field of digital technologies and the Internet in Belarus, has always been under the strict control of law enforcement agencies, exercised through, among others, a special body called the Operative-Analytical Centre. The appointment of a security officer to the HTP shows that the authorities are no longer trying to pretend that there are some “offshores” or havens within the legal system that may have a more comfortable business climate and guarantees of non-interference from the state.

Another KGB operative, Mikhail Hlushakou, was appointed head of the National Historical Archive in August⁵¹. Within a few days of his appointment, there was a mass detentions of employees at the archive and those detained were later fired⁵².

CONTRADICTIONARY TRENDS IN THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

The reporting period saw diverse trends within the democratic forces. Due to this diversity, it is impossible to confirm if the trend of fragmentation, which slowed during the spring, ceased to exist or has been renewed.

On the one hand, there was a conflict in BYPOL, the initiative of former security officers, enduring throughout the summer. Some BYPOL members accused its informal leader, Aliaksandr Azarau, of non-transparent financial management (and, as it turned out later, a failure to pay salaries). These members left the organisation and created a new initiative called BELPOL. Despite the mediation of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, representatives of the new organisation and Azarau have continued to criticise each other in the media. Due to reputational concerns, by the beginning of August, the position of the BYPOL leader in Tsikhanouskaya's United Transitional Cabinet was under threat. The Coordination Council (CC), which assumed part of the standard parliamentary functions, voted against the appointment of Azarau to a new one-year term at the hearings on the work of the United Transitional Cabinet. Tsikhanouskaya followed the CC's recommendation and, as a result, the United Transitional Cabinet lost its second minister (at the end of 2022, so-called Finance Minister Tatsiana Zaretskaya left the organisation).

The resolution of this conflict has shown a positive trend in the institutional development of the opposition. Several features of the resolution – Tsikhanouskaya's mediation at the very beginning of the crisis, the organisation of hearings in the Coordination Council as a reporting mechanism and instrument of control over the Cabinet, as well as the way Azarau was dismissed but not alienated

⁴⁹ «Оппозиционеры пусть видят и боятся». В МВД создали три новых отряда спецназа // Зеркало, 2023

⁵⁰ В ПВТ – новый руководитель. Работал в КГБ, МИДе, ИАЦ, «Белтелекоме» // dev.BY, август 2023

⁵¹ В Национальном историческом архиве – новый директор. Он долгое время работал в КГБ // Наша Нива, август 2023

⁵² З Нацыянальнага гістарычнага архіва звальняюць 8 чалавек // Наша Нива, жнівень 2023

from the Cabinet (he remains “the coordinator of work with the underground movement in Belarus”) – show a new quality of political culture in the democratic forces. Their ability to come up with compromise procedures for conflict resolution and the prevention of potential scandals is improving.

Another trend, to some extent compensating for the negative consequences of the split in BYPOL, was the regular dialogue between the Warsaw-Vilnius and Kyiv centres of the democratic forces. On 7 June, the leaders of the Kastus Kalinousky Regiment (KKR) and Tsikhanouskaya had an online call with the Ukrainian MPs⁵³. On 1 August, Tsikhanouskaya's deputy in the United Transitional Cabinet, Pavel Latushka, and her senior adviser Franak Viachorka met with the leaders of the KKR and the leader of the Supratsiu (“Resistance”) movement (which is close to the KKR) Dmitry Shchyhelski in Kyiv. Tsikhanouskaya also attended the four-hour meeting remotely⁵⁴. On 21 August, Valery Kavaleuski, the democratic leader's representative for foreign affairs, Henadz Manko, the head of the democratic forces' mission in Ukraine, and Anatol Liabedzka, Tsikhanouskaya's adviser for parliamentary cooperation and constitutional reform, went to Kyiv⁵⁵. One of the goals of their visit was to meet with the leaders of the KKR and hand over humanitarian aid.

Furthermore, a representative of the KKR took part in an event organised by the mainstream opposition for the first time. Pavel Kukhta attended the democratic forces' conference in Warsaw on 6 August. Although Kukhta expressed plenty of criticism and voiced conceptual differences with the positions of the United Transitional Cabinet and Tsikhanouskaya's Office, the KKR's representative recognised her as the international representative of the Belarusian people. The KKR's plans to hold its own conference in Kyiv in the fall to create some new “national liberation movement” are unlikely to contribute to the unity of the opposition, but their open invitation to all political forces to come to this event also demonstrates the KKR's growing openness to contacts with other democratic forces.

The reason behind the KKR's new willingness for cooperation may be the delays in creation of an alternative oppositional coalition of national democratic and militant structures called the Security Council. Alongside the KKR, the Security Council would have included Zianon Pazniak and his Volnaya Belarus movement. As Pazniak himself reported at the end of July, the creation of this coalition was postponed “for internal reasons.”⁵⁶

⁵³ «У грамадстве трэба кансалідацыя ўсіх людзей, што прагнуць свабоды Беларусі». Бойцы полка Каліновскага пагаворылі с Тыхановскай // Зеркало, июнь 2023

⁵⁴ Представители Офиса Тихановской провели встречу с командирами полка Каліновскаго // Еврорадио, август 2023

⁵⁵ Ковалевский и Лебедько отправились в Киев для переговоров и передачи помощи белорусским добровольцам // Наша Нива, август 2023

⁵⁶ Позняк: Создание Совета безопасности отложено из-за внутренних причин // Наша Нива, июль 2023

3 FOREIGN ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The key trends in Belarus's foreign economic relations during the summer were an intensification of sanctions activity against it, the continued outflow of foreign businesses, and the search for new ways and pretexts for receiving Russian assistance.

SANCTIONS: TIGHTENING OF TRANSIT RULES AND DISCUSSION ABOUT EASING MEASURES ON THE POTASSIUM INDUSTRY

During the reporting period, Ukraine's allies continued to impose targeted sanctions against Belarusian companies and individuals. The UK has extended its restrictions on imports of gold, timber, rubber and cement from Belarus⁵⁷. Italy has frozen €2bn-worth of Russian and Belarusian assets⁵⁸, and the EU imposed new sanctions against 38 Belarusian citizens and three state-owned enterprises⁵⁹.

The two most discussed topics over the summer in respect of sanctions were the possibilities of completely closing the EU's borders with Belarus and the potential easing of sanctions against the Belarusian potash industry.

In July, following an announcement made back in the spring, Lithuania introduced restrictions on the transit of goods through Belarus and Russia⁶⁰, as well as introducing stricter cargo declaration requirements to prevent potential violations of the sanctions regime. Additional restrictions have also been imposed on exports of dual-use goods⁶¹. The Belarusian regime appears to have exhausted its options for responding with new economic measures of its own and, in addition to aggravating the situation at the borders, the authorities have responded only by banning imports of Lithuanian and Polish low-alcohol drinks and apples⁶².

The two more discussed topics over the summer with prospective economic effects were the possibility of completely closing the EU border with Belarus and the potential easing of sanctions against the Belarusian potash industry

In August, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia actively began to discuss a potential mechanism for closing their borders with Belarus simultaneously. The backdrop for these discussions was the stationing of Wagner PMC fighters in Belarus. The countries continue discussing their options even after Yevgeny Prigozhin, the PMC's head, died⁶³.

When a new package of EU sanctions was introduced, analysts and insiders paid a great deal of attention to the potential easing of sanctions against Belarusian potash (for a detailed discussion see the chapter on Foreign Policy). In the end, no easing took place, but in exchange for the lack of progress on this issue, those countries that were calling for more extensive sanctions in other sectors had to settle for a less ambitious new package of restrictive measures.

⁵⁷ [Великобритания расширила санкции против Беларуси из-за поддержки ею кремлевского режима в войне против Украины](#) // Настоящее Время, июнь 2023

⁵⁸ [Власти Италии заморозили активы граждан Беларуси и России на сумму 2 млрд евро](#) // Зеркало, июль 2023

⁵⁹ [ЕС ввел санкции против 38 силовиков и пропагандистов, а также трех белорусских компаний](#) // Зеркало, август 2023

⁶⁰ [Литва вводит новые ограничения на транзит товаров через Беларусь и Россию](#) // Office Life, июнь 2023

⁶¹ [Теперь официально: Литва запретила вывоз и реэкспорт товаров двойного назначения](#) // Office Life, июль 2023

⁶² [Беларусь забараніла ўвоз літоўскага і польскага піва](#) // Наша Ніва, чэрвень 2023

⁶³ [Польша и страны Балтии не исключают закрытие границ с Беларусью из-за вагнеровцев. Как страны оценивают ситуацию после гибели Пригожина](#) // Зеркало, август 2023

For sure, the struggle between lobbyists advocating for and against sanctions does not end here. Representatives of Belarus and international business stakeholders have continued to pursue their line. A Lithuanian rail carrier – LTG Cargo – reported an ongoing inflow of requests for transporting potash: in May alone, they had to reject about 100 requests for transport⁶⁴. Among the lobbyists for the removal of potash restrictions was a Lithuanian entrepreneur⁶⁵. The Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) joined the lobbying efforts by developing its relations with Brazil⁶⁶. The main argument made by those in support of lifting sanctions is concerns for food security and the global shortage of potash fertilisers caused by the partial removal of a major potash producer (Belarus) from the market. Indeed, as of the end of summer, global potash prices are 30-50% higher than historical average prices, but there is clearly no global potassium shortage since prices have only decreased since April 2022.

FOREIGN BUSINESSES: CONTINUING EXIT FROM THE COUNTRY, WHILE OCCUPATION ADMINISTRATIONS SUPPLANT EUROPEANS

The outflow of foreign companies from Belarus continues: in the first six months of 2023, the representative offices in Minsk of 34 organisations with foreign capital closed, and only 11 opened⁶⁷. JYSK began liquidating its management company in Belarus in June⁶⁸. Meanwhile, Stadler rejected an order from the Minsk Metro for new underground trains, referring to sanctions, and Belarus decided therefore to procure new electric trains from Russia⁶⁹.

Several economic partnerships with the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine have already been launched or announced during the reporting period. First, Belarusian grain began to be shipped through the port of Mariupol⁷⁰. Secondly, the occupation administration in the Donetsk region agreed to cooperate with Amkodor, a Belarusian holding⁷¹, and signed a cooperation agreement with Mogilevliftmash⁷².

Symbolic steps included the termination of the Double Taxation Avoidance Treaty with Ukraine by Belarus and the simultaneous ratification of a Double Taxation Avoidance Treaty with Zimbabwe⁷³. No less significant in this context was Kazakhstan's denunciation of the agreement on the mutual conversion of national currencies⁷⁴.

⁶⁴ “LTG Cargo” gegužę atmetė 300 paraiškų gabenti krovinius, daugiausiai – trašų // 15min, чэрвень 2023

⁶⁵ Снятие санкций с белорусского калия спасёт мир от голода? Разбираемся, так ли это и при чём здесь «литовский след» // Belarusian Investigative Center, июнь 2023

⁶⁶ Алейник пригласил в Беларусь президента Бразилии. Его обхаживает и Лукашенко – эта страна лоббирует снятие санкций с белорусского калия // Зеркало, август 2023

⁶⁷ За полгода в Минске закрылось в три раза больше иностранных компаний, чем открылось // Office Life, июль 2023

⁶⁸ JYSK ликвидирует управляющую компанию в Беларуси // Office Life, июнь 2023

⁶⁹ Надежда Лазаревич встретила с работниками метрополитена. Какая тема стала основной во время беседы // Минск Новости, июль 2023

⁷⁰ Первая компания из Беларуси начала экспорт зерна через порт оккупированного Мариуполя // Зеркало, июнь 2023

⁷¹ Самопровозглашенная ДНР договорилась о сотрудничестве с холдингом «Амкодор» // Зеркало, 2023

⁷² Самопровозглашенная ДНР и «Могилевлифтмаш» подписали соглашение о сотрудничестве // Зеркало, август 2023

⁷³ Соглашение об избежании двойного налогообложения разорвано с Украиной и одобрено с Зимбабве // Office Life, июль 2023

⁷⁴ Казахстан разрывает соглашение с Беларусью о конвертируемости курсов нацвалют // reform.by, август 2023

BELARUS CONTINUES TO LOOK FOR NEW WAYS TO RECEIVE RUSSIAN SUPPORT

Despite the challenges around the allocation of a Russian “import substitution loan” mentioned by Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the spring, the first loan installment arrived this summer nevertheless and was successfully disbursed. Dmitry Krutoy, the Ambassador of Belarus to Russia, said that Vladimir Putin had agreed to provide Belarus with a low natural gas price until 2031 as part of a long-term contract with Gazprom⁷⁵. Previously, Belarus wanted to raise tariffs for pumping Russian oil, but the Russian firm Transneft rejected the proposed new prices⁷⁶.

Prime Minister Raman Halouchanka said that Belarus was ready to acquire the former Volvo car plant in Russia⁷⁷. Considering that Belarus’s recent role in the automotive industry, like that of Russia, has only been assembling Chinese cars, the essence of this proposal is seen to be to obtain a Russian plant at a large discount, or perhaps there are expectations of receiving potential subsidies from the Russian state budget to launch assembly production of a new car.

In addition, Halouchanka announced an intention to produce a light aircraft jointly with Russia on the territory of Belarus⁷⁸. These plans are unlikely to be realised, as was the case with past proposals for producing combat drones, laptops, electric vehicles, motorcycles and other products. At best, the joint venture will result in some aircraft made in – as usual – China. However, the process of design and preparation for production of an aircraft made in the Union State may be perceived by the Belarusian side as another type of subsidy.

⁷⁵ Крутой: для Беларуси до 2031 года будет действовать самая низкая цена на российский газ // SB.BY, июнь 2023

⁷⁶ Российская «Транснефть» не согласилась с увеличением тарифов на прокачку нефти Беларусью // reform.by, июнь 2023

⁷⁷ Белоруссия готова купить автозавод Volvo в Калуге // Интерфакс, июль 2023

⁷⁸ Беларусь и Россия начнут выпускать легкий двухмоторный самолет // Sputnik, июль 2023

4 THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY

The Belarusian economy's recovery continued during the reporting period, but the first signs of economic overheating due to excessive stimulation emerged as well. Despite this, the government continued to maintain a loose monetary policy while concurrently ensuring administrative price controls. The trend towards nationalisation of the economy has also continued: the state hurts private businesses and helps public ones.

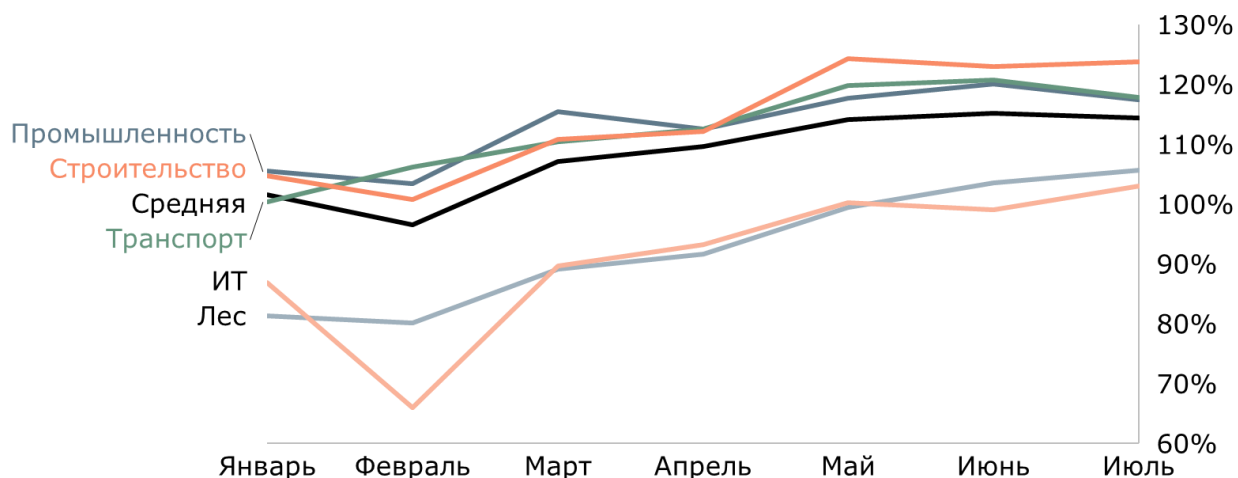
ECONOMY GROWTH RECOVERY CONTINUES, BUT WITH SIGNS OF OVERHEATING

In the summer of 2023, the Belarusian economy continued its recovery growth with the help of stimuli actively provided by the monetary authorities. The growth rate over the summer months increased compared to the spring, bridging the gap relative to 2021. In May, June and July 2023, year-on-year growth rates amounted to 7.4%, 7.1% and 7.6% respectively; thus, the gap from 2021 reduced from 2.5% recorded in the spring to about 1%. Imbalances accompanying the artificial stimulation of the economy also increased over the summer, and the growth impulse they produced began to fade: adjusting for seasonal factors, GDP was roughly 1% lower in July than a month earlier.

The excessive stimulation of the economy is already apparent. In June, the total amount of cash in circulation jumped by 54% and reached BYN 8.6 billion. Stockpiles, which reached a historical high in the first quarter of 2023, began to decrease slightly, but their qualitative composition changed: food products, which had not experienced sales challenges previously, were among the problematic goods. According to Prime Minister Raman Halouchanka, dairy product stocks reached US\$400 million in June. Real wage growth is twice as high as GDP growth, and there is a record shortage in the labour market. All these factors lead to the conclusion that the current recovery growth of the Belarusian economy is only partially sustainable, which means that the country may soon face higher volatility caused by the imbalances.

The industries that struggled in 2022 — manufacturing, construction, trade and transport — have become the leaders of economic growth. The manufacturing industry grew by 14% in May, by 16.6% in June and by 14.2% in July. The success of supply chain recovery in potash exports, as well as the unique situation where Belarus benefits from price restrictions on Russian oil, are the factors behind the strong statistics in this sector. The previous issue of the Belarusian Change Tracker described this situation in detail.

Figure 1. Volume in 2023 as a percentage of the same month in 2022



The construction sector, depressed since the beginning of the current crisis, perked up in May and continued its positive performance in June and July. The year-on-year monthly growth rates were 20.1%, 13% and 13% respectively. The sector has become the main beneficiary of a looser monetary policy due to a combination of several favourable factors. First of all, since this sector depends on “long-term money”, its prosperity is directly related to the cost of credit. Secondly, one of the side effects of the sanctions is that Belarusians have had fewer options for saving their money: due to financial sanctions and international toxicity, investing in shares, saving money in foreign accounts, or even making deposits in US dollars or euros in Belarusian banks have become problematic. This pent-up motivation to save, coupled with cheap credit and rising inflation expectations, has led to higher demand for real estate. Thus, apartment sales in Minsk during May⁷⁹ and June⁸⁰ exceeded historical highs, and the price per square metre did not decrease despite the exodus of a significant share of the wealthier population from the country. Finally, the construction sector serves as a traditional channel for governments seeking non-market GDP stimulation.

The trade sector grew by 15.4% in May, by 13.5% in June, and by 12.7% in July, exceeding its pre-war growth level. Consumer demand, which was depressed for much of last year, has begun to pick up thanks to looser credit conditions and rising real wages. If compared to the corresponding months of 2022, real wages were 14.2% higher in May, 15.2% higher in June, and 14.4% higher in July. This growth occurred against the backdrop of ongoing labour market shortages⁸¹. The previous issue of Belarus Change Tracker described the demographic trends in Belarus in detail.

In the summer months, the transport sector grew slightly (by roughly 9% versus a 27% drop a year earlier). The volume of cargo transport remains 35% below its 2021 level, but passenger transport volumes grew even if it should not be deemed sustainable growth. Passenger transport by rail is unprofitable in Belarus because of excessive subsidies, and US sanctions on Belavia threaten profitable air passenger travel⁸².

The already traditional anti-leader of the Belarusian economy, the IT sector, is shrinking: growth has been in the range of between -13% and -15% versus 2021. The baseline is important here because, formally speaking, the sector’s decline has begun to slow down and year-on-year it amounted to 18% in May, 15.8% in June, and 5.6% in July. However, July 2022 was also the first month of the fall in

⁷⁹ В Минске зафиксирован исторический рекорд по покупке квартир // Office Life, июнь 2023

⁸⁰ Абсолютный рекорд за последние полтора года в Минске // Авангард Недвижимость, июль 2023

⁸¹ В Беларуси – рост официальных безработных и рекордный дефицит работников. Как такое возможно // Зеркало, 2023

⁸² США ввели санкции против авиакомпании «Белавиа» и Минского завода гражданской авиации. Под ограничения попал самолет правительства Беларуси // Настоящее Время, август 2023

the added value of the sector in the recent history of Belarus. If the baseline is 2021, then the corresponding drop was 12.9% in May, 14.7% in June, and 13.9% in July.

A symbolic final nail in the coffin of the progressive and independent image of the Belarusian IT industry was hammered in by the appointment of a former KGB press secretary to the position of the head of the High Tech Park (HTP) in August⁸³. A slow trend reversal in the IT sector is likely in the coming months: growth will begin versus the bottom baseline of 2022, and the sector will gradually recover to the 2021 level. However, due to the declining share of the sector in the economy, its previous contribution to overall GDP growth rate can no longer be expected⁸⁴.

THE GOVERNMENT PURSUES A LOOSE MONETARY POLICY WHILE CURBING INFLATION

In addition to the record growth in real wages, Belarusians are borrowing more through loans. Citizens set another record for the volume of bank debt in June⁸⁵ only to break the record again in July⁸⁶. Against this background, the volume of cash in circulation increased sharply: growing by 24.4% in the first half of the year⁸⁷, and by 54% in June alone⁸⁸. Alyaksandr Lukashenka decided to expand the Development Bank's mandate in late June; the bank can now not only finance enterprises directly, but also issue bank guarantees for lending from commercial banks⁸⁹. As part of its core business, the Bank – the main conductor of public investment – financed projects worth BYN 1.2 billion in the first six months of the year, thus almost doubling the corresponding figure for the same period in 2022⁹⁰. The Ministry of Finance made the debut placement of Belarusian bonds in Chinese yuan in late August; however, a total amount equivalent to US\$30 million was placed on the Belarusian Currency and Stock Exchange (BCSE):⁹¹ the placement on the Chinese exchange failed because the sovereign rating of Belarus was too low.

Since there are more funds at the disposal of businesses and households, and since the parallel import mechanisms have improved, the demand for foreign goods has begun to grow at an accelerated pace. This is a fairly standard effect for Belarus: something similar was observed in previous episodes when money was pumped into the economy artificially. The essence of this effect is that, given the opportunity owing to increased incomes, Belarusians begin to purchase foreign goods and services in greater proportions, and vice versa – with a decreasing income, households substitute the consumption of more expensive imported goods with cheaper domestic ones. So, for the first half of the year, with an increase in exports by 12.4% to US\$19.4 billion, imports grew by 22.6% to US\$21 billion⁹². Although in previous years the negative balance of trade in goods was usually offset by a positive balance of trade in services, the situation looks more alarming now because the main laggards of economic recovery are service sectors (the transport and IT sectors).

The situation concerning Belarusian public debt also developed in the summer. The Ministry of Finance continues to insist that Belarus is not in a limited default status on its Eurobonds. To support its position, the Ministry of Finance “paid” coupons on Eurobonds in Belarusian rubles again in June

⁸³ [В ПВТ – новый руководитель. Работал в КГБ, МИДе, ИАЦ, «Белтелекоме»](#) // dev.BY, август 2023

⁸⁴ [Доля IT-сектора в экономике Беларуси снизилась до 4,7%](#) // Office Life, август 2023

⁸⁵ [Жизнь взаимы. Белорусы установили очередной рекорд по банковским долгам](#) // Зеркало, июнь 2023

⁸⁶ [Долги белорусов перед банками достигли исторического максимума](#) // Точка, июль 2023

⁸⁷ [Наличных в обороте стало больше на четверть. что это значит?](#) // Office Life, июль 2023

⁸⁸ [В экономике – рекордный прирост «лишних» миллиардов рублей. С чем это может быть связано](#) // Зеркало, июль 2023

⁸⁹ [Лукашенко расширил задачи «Банка развития»](#) // reform.by, июль 2023

⁹⁰ [Банк развития в I полугодии профинансировал проекты почти на Вг1,2 млрд](#) // Белта, август 2023

⁹¹ [Минфин разместил гособлигации в китайских юанях. Вот какой был спрос](#) // Зеркало, август 2023

⁹² [Во внешней торговле набирает обороты проблема с импортом](#) // Зеркало, август 2023

and August^{93,94}. Some Russian holders of Belarusian Eurobonds, who previously tried — believing Belarusian officials — to withdraw funds owing to them from an account in Belarusbank and failed⁹⁵, have since filed a lawsuit with the Russian court⁹⁶. The prospect that a court in Moscow will decide to rule in favour of Russian citizens over the image and interests of Russia's last ally looks doubtful, as does the fact that, even in the event of a positive court ruling, Minsk would listen to it when US\$500 million is at stake! Perhaps, by taking all these actions, Russian investors are counting on compensation from the Russian government.

Despite active emission, inflation remained low in Q2; and in June, the annual equivalent of price increase reached its historical low of 2.9%⁹⁷. According to statements by the National Bank, this result was partly achieved due to three reasons: the strengthening of the Belarusian ruble against the Russian ruble, slowing inflation in Russia, and the existing administrative price controls⁹⁸. According to the National Bank, administrative price controls continued to curb inflation in the first half of 2023. This admission contradicts the central bank's previous position that administrative price controls were intended to smooth out temporary shocks and should not affect pricing in the medium term.

According to the National Bank's data, the inflationary overhang — i.e. the difference between inflation without administrative price controls and actual inflation — increased to 5.6 percentage points by Q2. Given this, it seems likely that inflation will begin to rise later this year, although the size of a possible jump is difficult to estimate as it depends on the actions of the National Bank. According to forecasts, inflation will accelerate by the end of the year, but it will still be far from its historical highs. The forecasts vary: BEROC's analysts expect that inflation will be in the range of 5%-7%⁹⁹; by the end of the year; the Eurasian Development Bank's forecast, updated in June, suggests inflation will be 7.8%¹⁰⁰; and the World Bank forecasts 11%¹⁰¹. The National Bank of Belarus itself expects annual inflation to rise to 6%-7%¹⁰².

The Ministry of Trade, despite acknowledging challenges with price controls, is still reluctant to abandon this practice. Instead, the Ministry plans to develop a new mechanism by the end of the year¹⁰³. According to global practice, price control is a much more complex task than it might seem at first glance; it is therefore unlikely that Belarusian officials will be able to design a sustainable and well-functioning mechanism in the foreseeable future. Despite the difficulties, the government continues showing more interest in price controls. The government plans to begin regulating prices for dental services on 1 November, and it has also decided to fix prices for firewood and peat for households^{104,105}.

⁹³ [Минфин заплатил обязательства по евробондам в рублях. Деньги остались в Беларуси](#) // Зеркало, август 2023

⁹⁴ [Минфин Беларуси выплатил доход по еврооблигациям в рублях](#) // reform.by, июнь 2023

⁹⁵ [Бат'ка облигация: Российские инвесторы не могут получить выплаты по белорусским госбондам](#) // Коммерсантъ, март 2023

⁹⁶ [Суд в Москве впервые рассматривает иск из-за выплат по евробондам Белоруссии](#) // РБК, июль 2023

⁹⁷ [Индекс потребительских цен в Беларуси вышел на исторический минимум](#) // Федерация профсоюзов Беларуси, июль 2023

⁹⁸ [Почему в Беларуси замедлилась инфляция — рассказал Нацбанк](#) // Муфп, июль 2023

⁹⁹ [Мониторинг экономики Беларуси: тенденции, настроения и ожидания](#) // Вегос, июль 2023

¹⁰⁰ [ЕАБР уточнил прогноз по инфляции для Беларуси на 2023 год](#) // Onliner, июнь 2023

¹⁰¹ [Прогноз по инфляции-2023. Как отрегулируют цены на лекарства, мобильную связь и топливо](#) // iLex, апрель 2023

¹⁰² [Инфляция в Беларуси может снизиться до 7-8% к концу 2023-го. Прогноз на экономику озвучил глава Нацбанка](#) // СТБ, апрель 2023

¹⁰³ [Глава МАРТ — о ситуации на потребительском рынке, инфляции и росте продаж отечественных товаров](#) // SV.BY, август 2023

¹⁰⁴ [В Беларуси вводится регулирование тарифов на все виды стоматологических услуг](#) // Министерство здравоохранения Республики Беларусь, июль 2023

¹⁰⁵ [В Беларуси решили зафиксировать цены на древесные гранулы для населения — как на дрова и торфобрикеты](#) // Зеркало, июль 2023

STATE CONTROL GROWS AND SPACE FOR PRIVATE BUSINESSES NARROWS

Although the adoption of a law restricting many types of business activities for individual entrepreneurs was postponed until the autumn¹⁰⁶, many types of business faced prohibitive government regulations during the reporting period.

In July, the deadline expired during which agricultural estates – once a favourite business activity in Lukashenka’s eyes – had to undergo additional registration. Only half of the existing agricultural enterprises were able to do this¹⁰⁷. The government wants to introduce additional obligatory certification for hotels as well¹⁰⁸.

State-owned enterprises are faring better. The government gave loan repayment guarantees to Belorusskie Oboi (Belarusian wallpaper), a chronically unprofitable state enterprise owned by the state-owned Belarusbank¹⁰⁹. Large Belarusian enterprises reported that they had already utilised the first installment of the Russian “import substitution” loan¹¹⁰. Belorusneft plans to build a plant to produce fractionated sand in the Brest region¹¹¹. The BelGee Belarusian-Chinese Car Plant plans to produce 9,500 cars this year, which is double the production of a year earlier¹¹².

Belarusian potash producers encountered problems and began to solve them at the expense of the state immediately. The fact is that the new logistics chains, established after Lithuania banned the transport of Belarusian potassium through its territory, are much more expensive than transport through the port of Klaipeda. All the while potash commanded high prices, the manufacturer could afford to reduce the profitability of shipments, but now, when global prices for fertilisers have practically returned to their pre-war values, transporting potash to China by rail has become unprofitable¹¹³. It was decided to shift the problems of receivables of Belaruskali to commercial banks, and in the meantime¹¹⁴, the government can only hope that certain south European countries continue to lobby for the lifting of potash sanctions.

¹⁰⁶ ИП продлили жизнь: закон о переходе в юрлица парламент доработает осенью // Office Life, июнь 2023

¹⁰⁷ Чуть более половины агроэкоусадоб прошли перерегистрацию в исполкомах – есть ли сложности // SB.BY, июль 2023

¹⁰⁸ Чиновники решили взяться за гостиницы, для них разработали новое требование // Зеркало, август 2023

¹⁰⁹ Беларусбанк получил гарантии правительства на погашение кредита «белорусских обоев» // Office Life, июль 2023

¹¹⁰ В Беларуси освоили на импортозамещение 900 млн рублей из российского кредита // Еврорадио, июль 2023

¹¹¹ «Белоруснефть» построит завод по производству фракционного песка в Брестской области // Белта, июнь 2023

¹¹² «БЕЛДЖИ» планирует вдвое увеличить объем реализации авто на внутренний рынок // Белорусы и рынок, июль 2023

¹¹³ Белорусский калий попал в ловушку низких цен // Белорусы и рынок, июль 2023

¹¹⁴ Проблему «долгих» расчетов с «Беларуськалия» переложат на банки // Sputnik, июль 2023

5 TRENDS IN PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion in Belarus remains polarized. Segments of both the opponents and supporters of the current regime continue to hold contrasting views on the political and economic situation in the country, as well as Belarusian foreign policy and the Russian's war against Ukraine. There is still a high level of tense mutual disagreement. In terms of dynamics, over the reporting As for the dynamics, during the reporting period, the slow growth in the number of those who trust the regime, which was recorded in winter and spring, stopped. The survey results also indicate that the deployment of nuclear weapons and the Wagner Group in Belarus did not find understanding in public opinion: even among staunch supporters of the state, these actions are approved by less than half.

INTERPRETATION OF SURVEY FINDINGS

Our study is based on an online panel¹¹⁵. This means that the distributions of responses in our sample may differ significantly from those of the Belarusian urban population as a whole. The sample is subject to shifts and may be affected by both opt-in bias (the self-selection effect) and the sample's composition may not be representative of the general population (that is, all Belarusian citizens living in cities).

What our study **does** show?

- Dynamics of public opinion: we track the changes in responses between quarterly surveys and interpret the dynamics revealed as an indicator of changes in public opinion on various matters. For example, if we see that the friendly attitude towards Russian nuclear weapons has changed by +/-5 percentage points, we can assume that there are certain changes in the attitude in our sample. If we see change by, say, +\ -15 percentage points, we can assume that there are very significant changes in the attitude.
- Variation across different segments of society: we can clearly see the structure of opinions within each social segment that we are investigating. For example, we know well how trust in state institutions is related to attitudes towards the Wagner Group, or to assessments of the political and economic state of the country.

What our research **does not** show?

The exact size of the segments and general distributions of opinions in society as a whole: we cannot tell the exact number of people in Belarusian society who are inclined to trust or distrust the regime, or the exact number of people supporting Russia or Ukraine in the war. We intentionally avoid mentioning distribution percentages for various issues in the sample as a whole, because when these

¹¹⁵ From BCT Issue 4 onwards, we changed our approach to sampling. To understand the new approach, and also our re-weighting of the older data, let us briefly explain how online panels work. An online panel is a service that recruits Belarusians online to take part in surveys. Recruiting is done via online advertising in such services as Google, Yandex, OK, VK (VKontakte) and Facebook, as well as via a snowball effect. The online panel gathers 70,000–100,000 participants. After registering in the panel, these people receive invitations to participate in various surveys.

Every month approximately 750 new participants are recruited, most of whom cease to be active panellists within six months, while about 15% remain active.

Starting from the Issue 4 of the BCT, the logic of the BCT survey is that significant changes or trends in wider society will be reflected in the survey's baseline population of 70,000–100,000 panellists, hence, random selection of a small sample of, say, 1,000 respondents and a weighting of the sample according to the online panel's structure should also reflect these changes.

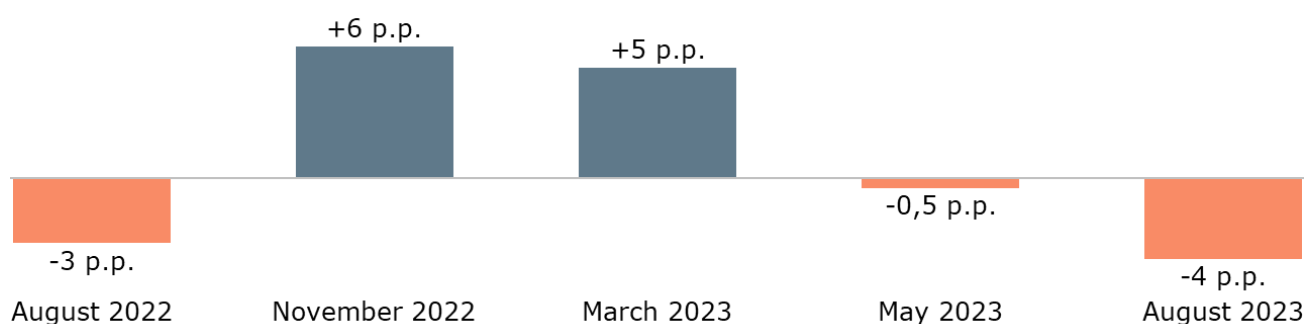
Also, the BCT sample was previously constructed on a quota basis, which could introduce distortions: for example, if a man of 18–24 years responded to an invitation to participate in the study after we had already recruited the "required" number of men aged 18–24, then he was not able to take the survey.

percentages are published, for example, in the media, they may contribute to an erroneous understanding of the social portrait of Belarusian society.

SOCIAL CONFRONTATION: DYNAMICS OF THE CONFLICT SEGMENTS SIZE HAVE PLATEAUED

During the third quarter of 2023, the sizes of the social conflict segments did not change. Figure 2 shows that the aggregated segment of supporters¹¹⁶ has decreased by 4 percentage points, which is statistically insignificant. This may be just a random fluctuation and not the beginning of any trend towards decreasing confidence, but we will need the next survey to corroborate this point. What we can say with confidence is that the trend of increasing confidence in the regime has stopped.

Figure 2. Change in the share of the aggregated segment of supporters the regime relative to the previous period (in percentage points)



The figure shows the difference between the share of those who trust the regime in the specified month and their share in the previous period. For example, in August 2022, the segment decreased by 3 percentage points compared to May 2022, and in November 2023 it increased by 6 percentage points compared to August 2022.

Thus, the dynamics of the political segments' size have reached a stable plateau. The share of those who trust the regime increased by several percentage points from the summer of 2022 to March 2023, but from March to August, the segment sizes remained unchanged.

These dynamics of changes in the sizes of the social conflict segments directly correlate with the dynamics of assessments of the overall political and economic situation in the country. The Social Sentiment Index (SSI)¹¹⁷ was also increasing from the summer of 2022 to March 2023, and after that, its value froze (Figure 3). That means that the SSI dynamics repeat the SSC dynamics.

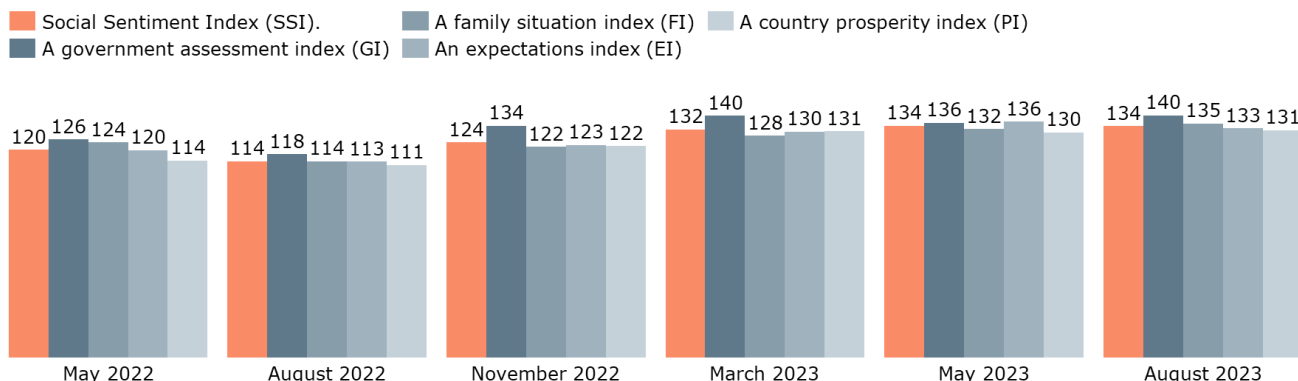
¹¹⁶ We single out segments of social conflict (SSC) mathematically, based on respondents' trust in a number of pro-government subjects and subjects opposing the authorities. For example, we ask about trust in the police, the KGB, the armed forces, state and non-state media, political prisoners, opponents and supporters of the current government. Trust is measured on a four-point Likert scale. To form segments, we use cluster analysis. As a result, we have four segments with different levels of trust in the current government: ardent supporters, moderate supporters, moderate opponents and ardent opponents. The aggregated segment of supporters is the total of ardent supporters and moderate supporters.

¹¹⁷ To track the dynamics of assessments of the political and economic situation in the country, we use the Social Sentiment Index (SSI). This index consists of four indicators:

- A family situation index (FI), reflecting respondents' subjective assessments of the emotional and material situation of their families;
- A country prosperity index (PI), combining assessments of the economic and political situation of the country as a whole;
- An expectations index (EI), reflecting people's perceptions of their personal future and that of the country;
- A government assessment index (GI), reflecting the level of approval of the state authorities in the country.

Figure 3. Social Sentiment Index dynamics, scale from 1 to 200

Data for all periods are weighted according to the structure of the online panel. Therefore, the graph does not reflect the real values of the Index for the Belarusian society, but shows changes: an increase and a decrease in the assessments of the situation.



Between November 2022 and March 2023, we changed the data collection method.

At the same time, over time the SSI dynamics differ from the dynamics within the segments of social conflict.

Moderate supporters and **moderate opponents** show wave-like SSI dynamics: higher assessments are followed by lower ones without a clear trend. At the same time, the size of the **moderate opponents** segment has increased over the last quarter. This growth can be explained by two factors:

- The depoliticisation of some **ardent opponents**: In the context of repressions and limited access to information, it is easy to imagine a situation where people decide to reduce their consumption of news content relating to military or democratic issues. Since media consumption correlates with the perceived severity of social conflict in the country, these people become more uncertain when answering questions about trust in regime institutions or groups associated with them.
- Violation of the anti-war consensus by the regime: In the previous Belarus Change Tracker issues, we wrote about the possible consequences of decisions that will 'drag' Belarus into the war. The deployment of the Wagner Group and Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus could negatively affect some **moderate supporters** and even **ardent supporters**. In subsection 5. 5, we explain the rather negative attitude of Belarusians towards the deployment of the Wagner Group in more detail

If the segment size remains the same in the next quarter, the trend will be confirmed.

Ardent supporters of the government are slightly, but continually, improving their assessments of the situation in the country. This may be due to excessively low assessments of the situation at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war when the expectation of a crisis was high. Over time, it became clear that the changes for the worse were not so dramatic. Thus, the reality turned out to be better than expectations, and the assessments of the situation gradually improved. Similar trends are also reflected in BEROС's Consumer Confidence Index ¹¹⁸.

High assessments of the situation in the country are reflected in the stable size of the **ardent supporters** segment throughout all the surveys. This means that in more than a year, since the summer of 2022, the regime, though failing to increase the number of convinced supporters by its actions, has not lost them either.

In the segment of **ardent opponents**, there was also a slight trend of improved assessments from August 2022 to May 2023, which has now stopped. At the same time, we see a steady decrease in the

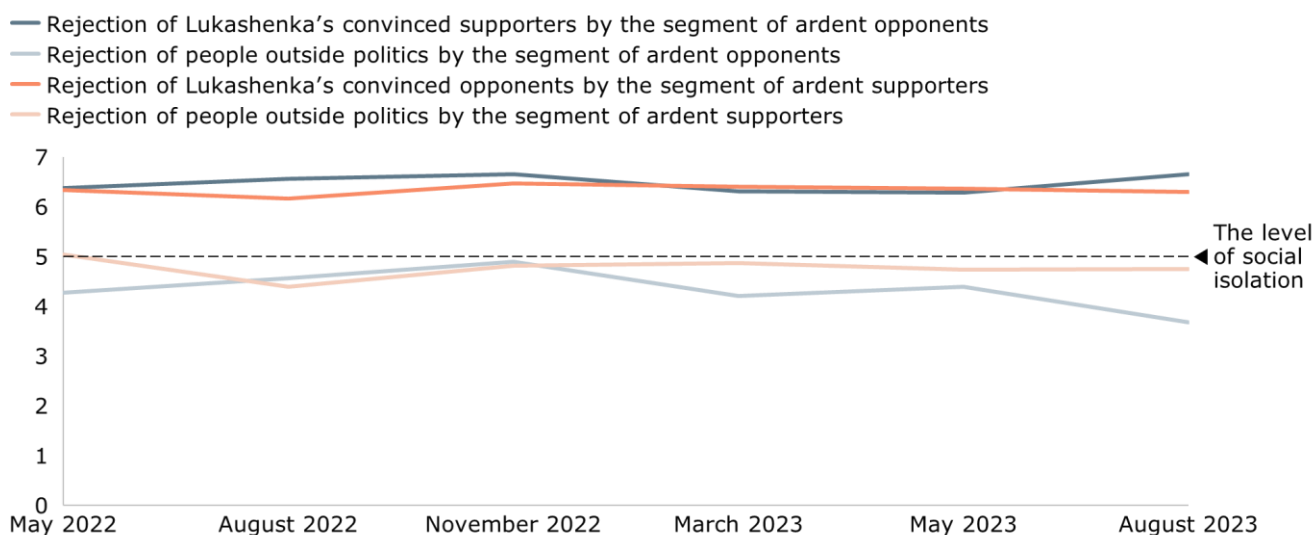
¹¹⁸ Мониторинг экономики Беларуси: тенденции, настроения и ожидания // BEROС, июнь 2023

share of this segment in the sample. This means there is a slow shrinking of the opposition's core support base. This trend has been ongoing since 2021, when, for example, Chatham House researchers also recorded¹¹⁹ a slight decrease in the protest core from the summer and autumn of 2021 to November 2021.

Thus, the plateau in trust towards the regime and in assessments of the political and economic situation in the country occurs because satisfaction in moderate segments and among the opponents of the current government stopped growing. Contrary to these dynamics, the core of regime supporters retains its size and has improved its assessment of the situation in the country.

At the same time, a plateau in the dynamics of the size of the political segments does not mean that the social conflict between them has become less severe. During the period analysed, the mutual rejection between the conflicting segments remained almost unchanged (Figure 4). **Ardent opponents** and **ardent supporters** express maximum rejection towards each other: the majority in each segment would prefer not to see their rivals in Belarus.

Figure 4. Level of the social distance of the social conflict segments as opposed to each other and to "people outside politics", scale from 1 to 7, where 7 is maximum rejection¹²⁰



Evaluate what kind of relationship with representatives of different groups or nationalities is acceptable to you personally. Finish the statement: I do not mind having the representatives of this group as...
 1 – close members of my family, 2 – my relatives, 3 – my friends, 4 – my colleagues, 5 – my neighbours, 6 – people living with me in the same house, 7 – would not wish to see them in my country.

The high intensity of the conflict at the identity level is also evidenced by the conflicting segments' significant rejection of people outside politics. The indicator of social distance in relation to such people has a value close to social isolation, which means that the political dimension remains an important part of life. At the same time, throughout 2023, the rejection of people outside politics by **ardent opponents** of the regime has been slowly decreasing. The reason may be that they are surrounded by people who have become more neutral in their views under the pressure of circumstances. We interpret such dynamics as an additional indicator of a certain depoliticisation of some **ardent opponents** – if they are ready to view non-politicised people more favourably, they make depoliticisation possible for themselves as well.

¹¹⁹ [Belarusians' views on the political crisis](#) // Chatham House, November 2021

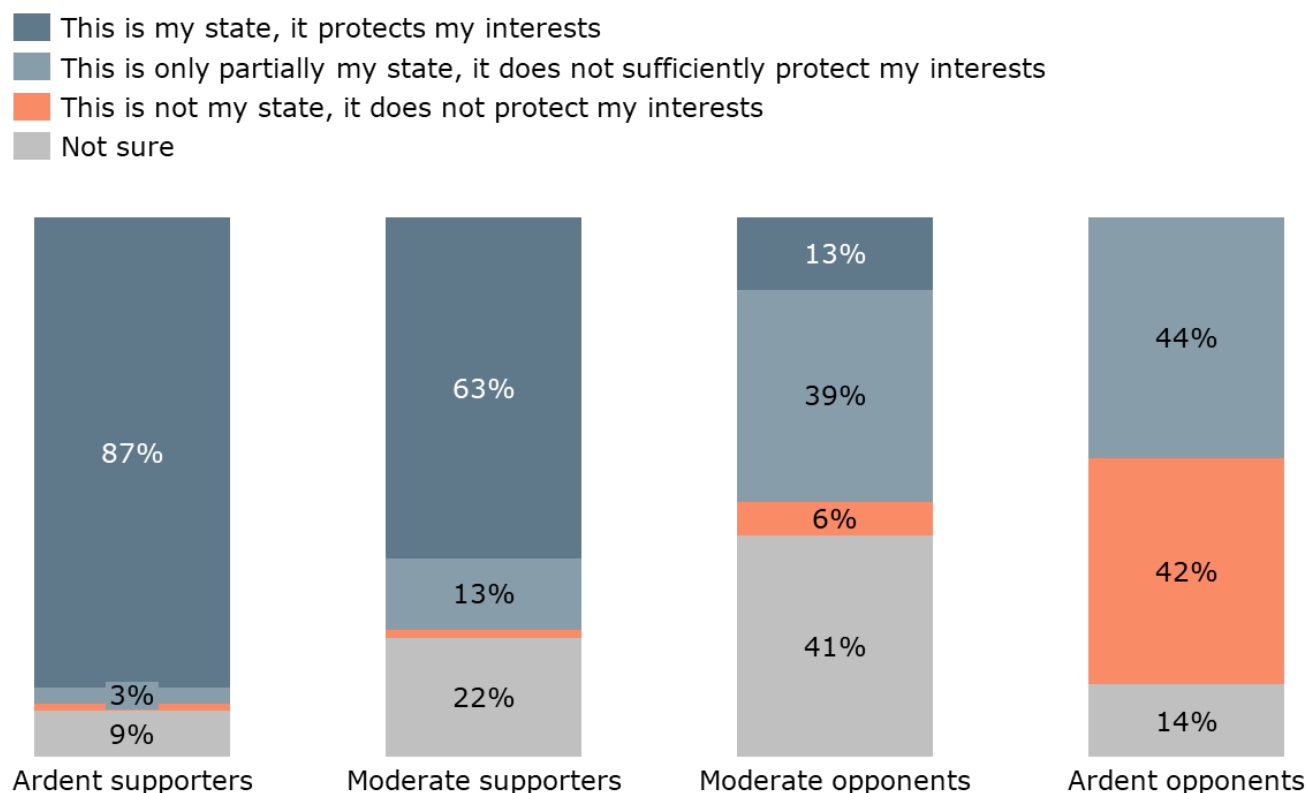
¹²⁰ To measure the level of rejection, we used the Bogardus scale. This measures the level of social distance on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 is full acceptance (ready to see someone as a family member), and 7 is complete rejection (do not want to see someone in the country).

The maximum level of mutual rejection between the ardent segments persists due to the unresolved socio-political contradictions, which are the basis of the confrontation in society.

Moreover, as other studies show, the reason for the split between Belarusian society and the state is deep-rooted differences about values¹²¹, views on the place of Belarus in international relations, and on its history and national identity¹²².

The role of identity (at least in a political sense) as the essence of the conflict is clearly visible if you ask Belarusians about their attitude towards the state (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Perception of the state in the segments of social conflict



Which of these statements about the Belarusian state better reflects your opinion?

We see that the opposition segments do not perceive Belarus as their state. Since the state is in fact the initiator of the conflict, disassociation from it is an important feature in the identity of many Belarusians.

¹²¹ The value differences between the audiences of state and independent media are explored in the study [Belarusians' views on the war and value orientations](#) // Chatham House, March 2023 or [Многофакторная структура белорусского общества](#) // Belarusian Analytical Workroom, июль 2023

¹²² The complex analysis of the connection between the position in the domestic political conflict, preferences in international politics and the perception of national identity is provided in the 2022 study [Belarusian identity in 2022: a quantitative study](#) // Philipp Bikanau, December 2022

Table 1. Approximate share of people who (do not) support the current government according to the opinions of Belarusians, by SCS¹²³

Groups of people, which were estimated by the respondents	According to ardent supporters	According to moderate supporters	According to moderate opponents	According to ardent opponents
People who support the current government	80%	68%	46%	26%
People who do NOT support the current government	17%	32%	54%	73%

What share of the Belarusian population, in your opinion, supports the current government? What share of the Belarusian population, in your opinion, does NOT support the current government?

Since **ardent opponents** think that a significant majority of people in the country do not support the current government, it is likely that they perceive the current Belarusian authorities as a kind of a foreign body that does not represent the majority of Belarusians. At the same time, a significant majority of **ardent supporters** (and **moderate supporters**) consider the state to be the defender of their interests and consider the opponents of the government a marginal minority.

THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL CONFLICT: BETWEEN STUMBLING BLOCK AND GENERAL CONSENSUS

Opposing perceptions of the war still distinguish the conflicting political segments. **Ardent supporters** of the current government support Russia more than others, and most often believe it is Russia that is winning. By contrast, **ardent opponents** of the regime most often support Ukraine and believe that it is winning (Table 2).

Table 2. Perception of the Russian-Ukrainian war across the segments of social conflict

↓ ↑ Statistically significant changes compared to May 2023 within the segment

Significantly more than among other segments

		Ardent supporters	Moderate supporters	Moderate opponents	Ardent opponents
The Russian-Ukrainian war has been going on since February 24, 2022. Which of the three statements about the Belarusian army better reflects your opinion?	It should take part in the war on the side of Ukraine	0,3%	1%	1%	9%
	It should take part in the war on the side of Russia	15%	↓ 4%	3%	0%
	It should not take part in the war on either side	84%	↑ 95%	96%	↑ 91%
Which side, in your opinion, is currently winning the Russian-Ukrainian war?	Ukraine is winning	1%	1%	↓ 6%	48%
	Russia is winning	54%	39%	14%	4%
	Both countries are in a roughly equal position	8%	8%	21%	20%
	Difficult to answer	37%	53%	↑ 59%	↑ 27%

¹²³ The questions were asked independently of each other, so the figures may not add up to 100%

		Ardent supporters	Moderate supporters	Moderate opponents	Ardent opponents
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Russia made a mistake when it started military action in Ukraine in 2022.	Completely disagree	34%	16%	10%	4%
	Rather disagree	↑47%	43%	21%	3%
	Rather agree	14%	34%	37%	13%
	Completely agree	5%	7%	33%	81%
In the new phase of the hostilities in Ukraine, which started on February 24, 2022, are you rather supporting Ukraine or Russia? Or none of them fully?	Rather Ukraine	1%	1%	17%	69%
	Rather Russia	60%	44%	11%	↓0,3%
	None of them fully	19%	26%	42%	22%
	Difficult to answer	20%	↑29%	30%	8%

At the same time, when asked whether Russia had made a mistake by starting the war on February 24, 2022, **ardent supporters** of the regime choose less confident options, while **ardent opponents** largely agree it was a mistake (Table 2). This may be an indication of the different nature of support in these groups. Supporters of the regime support Russia, although they appear to have some doubts about the decision to invade Ukraine, while opponents have a more consistent opinion, condemning Russia both for the decision and the current situation. In this sense, the position of the opponents of Russia's actions may be more solid, because they do not have to overcome doubts and contradictions.

There have been no significant changes in the perception of the war compared to the previous survey. **Moderate opponents** and **ardent opponents** began to choose the “Difficult to answer” option slightly more often when answering the question about the winning side (Table 2), but these are small changes and it is impossible to talk about any trend here yet.

Although the perception of the war remains a controversial topic for the segments of social conflict, there is one thing that unites them, which is an anti-war consensus. By that, we mean rejection of the idea of the Belarusian army's direct involvement in the conflict. The overwhelming majority in all segments answered that the Belarusian army should not take part in the war. Compared to the previous survey, there is a fluctuation in proportions by several per cent, which, although statistically significant, does not affect the overall picture (Table 2). The consensus is also confirmed by other studies. According to a study by the Belarusian Analytical Workroom, 80% oppose the idea of the Belarusian Army entering Ukraine ¹²⁴.

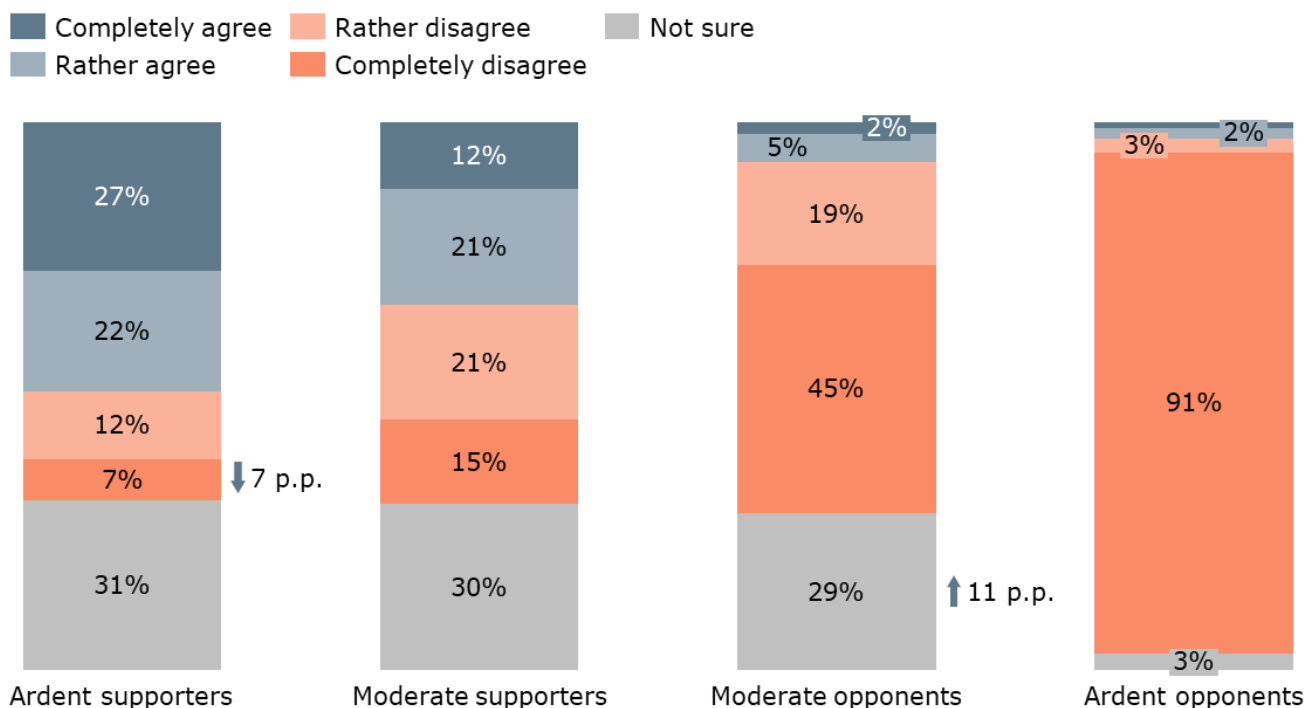
Another important war-related topic, which rather unites all political segments, concerns the stationing of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus. We can say with confidence that the regime has failed to build a narrative persuading public opinion to be accepting of nuclear weapons. A near consensus on this matter was demonstrated¹²⁵ by a Chatham House study in March 2023 (75% against). Our study, in turn, shows that the general public opinion on this matter has not changed during the third quarter of 2023 (Figure 6). Unpublished telephone studies also show the matter of Russian nuclear weapons to be, at the very least, controversial, without overwhelming acceptance or rejection¹²⁶.

¹²⁴ [Часть 2. Геополитические ориентации и отношение к войне в Украине](#) // Belarusian Analytical Workroom, 2023

¹²⁵ [Belarusians' views on the war and value orientations](#) // Chatham House, March 2023

¹²⁶ Interview with the author of a representative telephone survey, summer 2023

Figure 6. Attitude to the statement “I welcome the deployment of nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus”



How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about nuclear weapons in Belarus? I welcome the deployment of nuclear weapons in the territory of Belarus

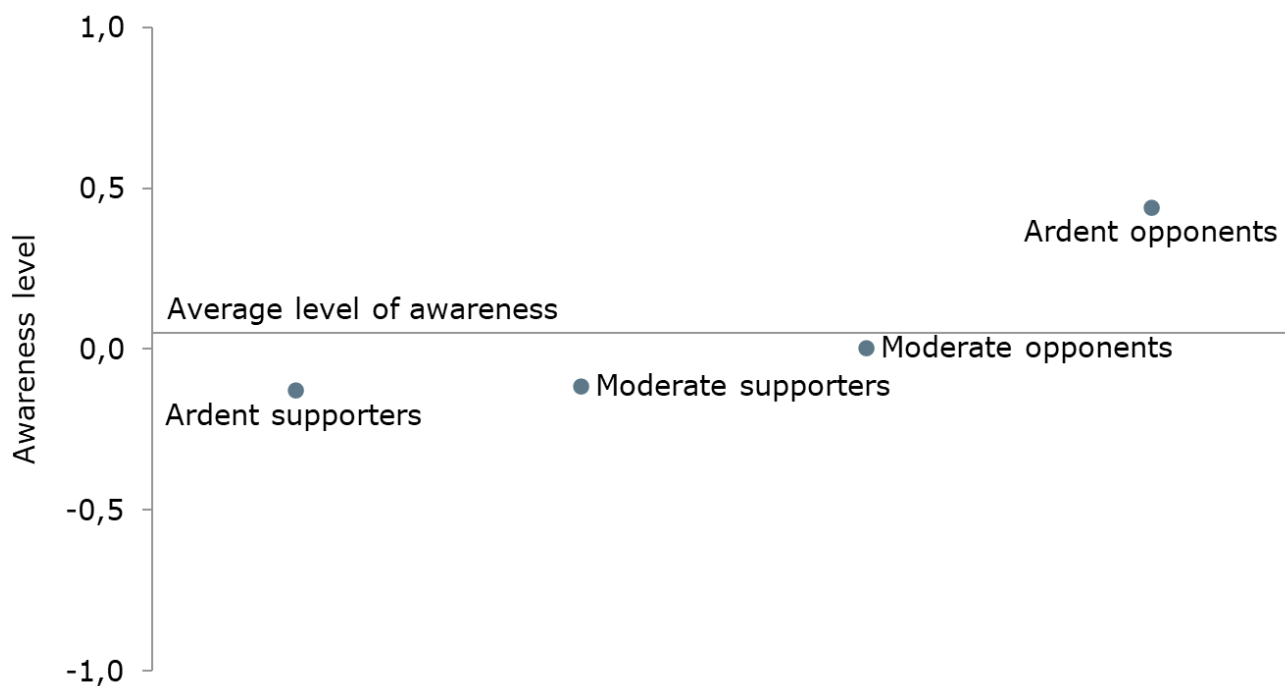
Yet opinions on nuclear weapons within specific political segments are slowly changing (Figure 6). As we predicted in the previous Belarus Change Tracker issue, **ardent supporters** of the regime are slowly adopting the authorities’ narrative: the share of those who completely disagree with the deployment of weapons has significantly decreased in this segment (Figure 6). Among **moderate opponents**, the share of those who support the weapons deployment slightly decreased due to an increased share of those unsure about the answer. This implies that, over the past quarter, there has been a slight polarisation of the political segments regarding the deployment of nuclear weapons.

Thus, despite the different perceptions of the war, the anti-war consensus remains a strong point of unity among Belarusians. The lack of clear support for the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons also remains prominent, but over time, nuclear weapons may become another polarising issue for society.

SOCIETY’S AWARENESS OF EVENTS

We offered the respondents eight statements and asked them to evaluate their awareness of the event mentioned in each statement. The answers they could give were: “I know all about it”, “I have heard something”, “It’s the first time I’m hearing about it”, or “I am sure this didn’t happen”. After that, we built an awareness index that ranges from -1 to 1, where -1 is poor awareness of all the events, and 1 is excellent awareness of all the events (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Awareness index in the segments of social conflict



We can see that most of society is rather unaware of the issues affecting it (Table 3). This is particularly evident when it comes to the events involving the oppositional democratic forces. To illustrate the point, let's take one of the events asked about: "The split of ByPol into two organisations, ByPol and BelPol". Only half of **ardent opponents** claim that they are more or less aware of this happening, not to mention all other segments of society. The recognition of some books by Dunin-Martsinkevich, Heniyush and Arsenneva as 'extremist' has a similarly low awareness level.

Table 3. Knowledge of some events

Significantly more than among other segments

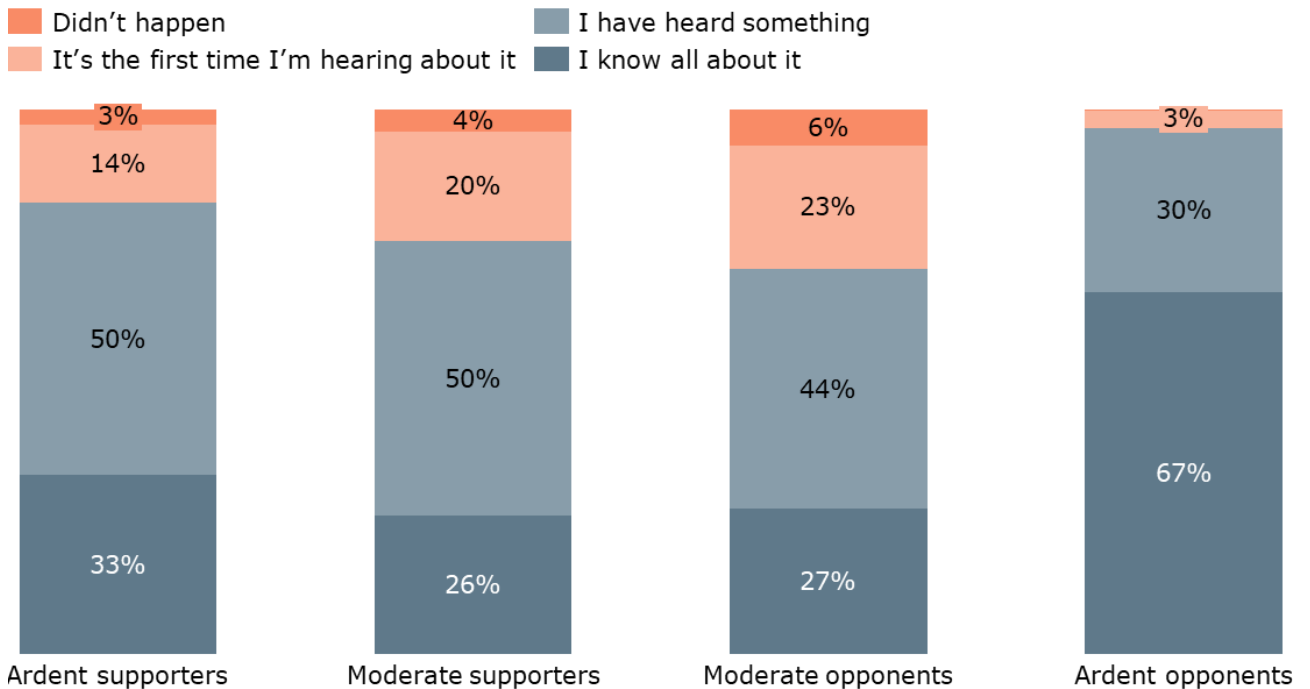
		Ardent supporters	Moderate supporters	Moderate opponents	Ardent opponents
Split of ByPol into two organizations: ByPol and BelPol	Didn't happen	4%	6%	6%	1%
	It's the first time I'm hearing about it	89%	82%	76%	44%
	I have heard something	7%	11%	16%	30%
	I know all about it	0.4%	0.4%	2%	25%
Recognition of some books by Dunin-Martsinkevich, Heniyush and Arsenneva as extremist	Didn't happen	4%	5%	11%	5%
	It's the first time I'm hearing about it	78%	74%	62%	41%
	I have heard something	15%	20%	23%	28%
	I know all about it	3%	1%	5%	26%
Issuance of an arrest warrant for Vladimir	Didn't happen	18%	14%	9%	8%

		Ardent supporters	Moderate supporters	Moderate opponents	Ardent opponents
Putin by the International Criminal Court	It's the first time I'm hearing about it	48%	48%	44%	17%
	I have heard something	21%	28%	32%	22%
	I know all about it	13%	11%	15%	53%
Violation of the Polish state border by two combat helicopters of the Belarusian army in August 2023	Didn't happen	19%	12%	8%	3%
	It's the first time I'm hearing about it	46%	54%	44%	32%
	I have heard something	29%	32%	42%	35%
	I know all about it	6%	2%	6%	30%

There are several events before you. For each of them, please answer: do you know all about it, heard something before or hear about it for the first time now? Or maybe you are sure it didn't happen at all?

At the same time, if we take the awareness of Prigozhin's military mutiny or the deployment of the Wagner Group in Belarus (Belarusians have approximately the same level of awareness of these two events), we will see that most Belarusians have at least heard something of these.

Figure 8. Awareness of the deployment of the Wagner Group (PMC) fighters in Belarus



There are several events before you. For each of them, please answer: do you know all about it, heard something before or hear about it for the first time now? Or maybe you are sure it didn't happen at all? Deployment of the Wagner Group (PMC) soldiers in the territory of Belarus

This means that information about one of the most important and dramatic events of the summer of 2023, and its consequences for Belarus, did reach the majority of Belarusians.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE WAGNER GROUP

Since the awareness of the Wagner Group situation is high, we can assume that it is quite important for most Belarusians. The attitude towards the Wagner Group also strongly correlates with a respondent's position in the social conflict.

We showed the respondents seven statements about the Wagner Group (Table 4). Even **ardent supporters** of the regime do not have unequivocal trust in the Wagner Group and do not assess them in unambiguously positive terms. At the same time, the Wagner Group has an unambiguously negative assessment only from **ardent opponents**. **Moderate opponents** are also somewhat cautious of the Wagner Group. In general, this gives us grounds to say that the Belarusian society regards the deployment of the Wagner Group, at best, with doubt. This can be explained by the anti-war consensus. The desire to keep Belarus outside of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is also reflected in Belarusians' attitude towards these active participants in this conflict, especially when it is unclear if they can be controlled.

Table 4. Attitude towards a number of statements about the Wagner Group, by SCS

Statement about the Wagner Group	Attitude to the statement	Ardent supporters	Moderate supporters	Moderate opponents	Ardent opponents
Deployment of the Wagner Group will improve Belarus's security	Completely agree	17%	7%	1%	0,0%
	Rather agree	30%	25%	10%	1%
	Rather disagree	9%	16%	26%	5%
	Completely disagree	4%	7%	28%	84%
	Difficult to answer	40%	46%	35%	10%
The Belarusian authorities will find it difficult to control the Wagner Group	Completely agree	4%	4%	17%	64%
	Rather agree	12%	20%	28%	20%
	Rather disagree	22%	23%	12%	2%
	Completely disagree	16%	5%	6%	3%
	Difficult to answer	46%	49%	37%	12%
Wagner Group is a direct threat to the security of Belarus	Completely agree	2%	2%	11%	59%
	Rather agree	7%	11%	23%	21%
	Rather disagree	23%	28%	16%	2%
	Completely disagree	33%	14%	7%	8%
	Difficult to answer	36%	45%	43%	10%
The Wagner Group soldiers committed war crimes in Ukraine	Completely agree	1%	2%	11%	58%
	Rather agree	5%	6%	21%	13%
	Rather disagree	8%	21%	10%	2%
	Completely disagree	35%	14%	6%	3%
	Difficult to answer	51%	58%	53%	24%
Even if the Wagner Group soldiers committed war crimes in Ukraine, it is acceptable	Completely agree	7%	3%	2%	3%
	Rather agree	20%	16%	6%	1%
	Rather disagree	11%	12%	18%	12%
	Completely disagree	8%	10%	28%	69%
	Difficult to answer	54%	59%	47%	16%

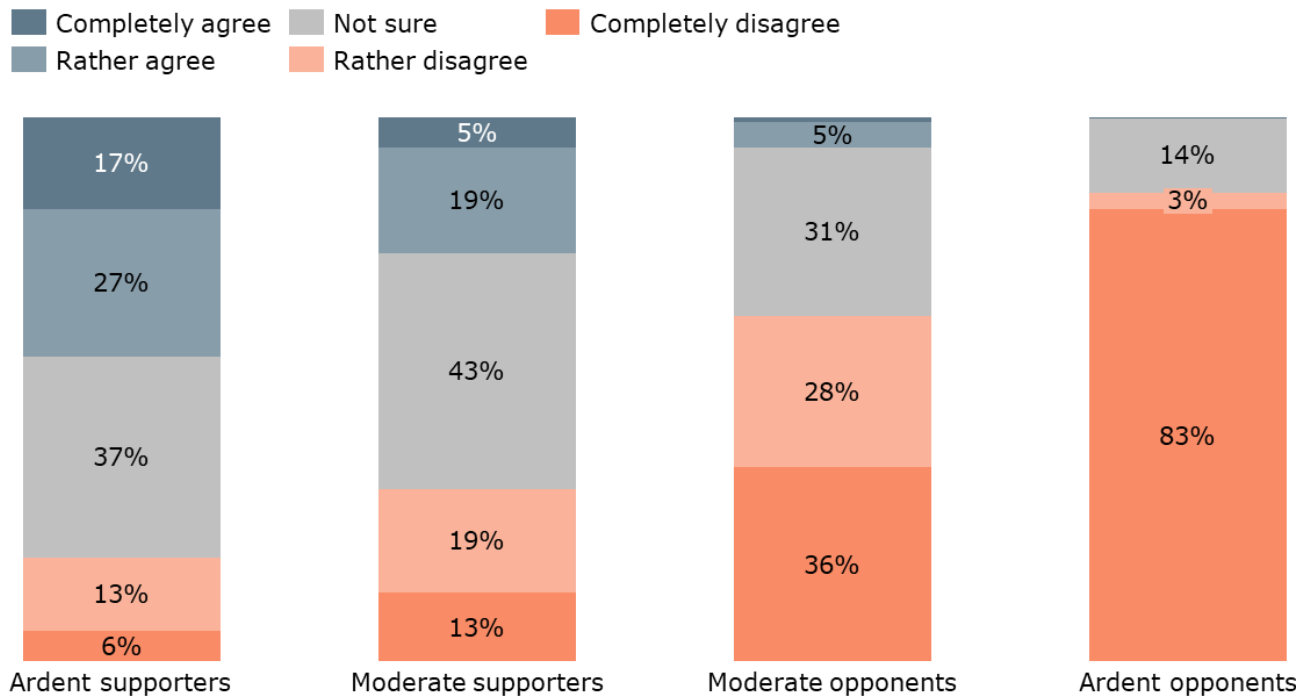
Significantly more than among other segments

Statement about the Wagner Group	Attitude to the statement	Ardent supporters	Moderate supporters	Moderate opponents	Ardent opponents
The Wagner Group soldiers in Belarus will be loyal to their command and not to the Belarusian leadership	Completely agree	9%	4%	14%	55%
	Rather agree	27%	32%	32%	17%
	Rather disagree	14%	11%	9%	2%
	Completely disagree	3%	2%	4%	5%
	Difficult to answer	47%	51%	41%	21%

There are several statements about the Wagner Group before you. How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?

This idea is confirmed by the distribution of answers to the question about Belarusians welcoming the deployment of the Wagner Group – the majority either cannot give an unequivocal answer to this question or answers in the negative. Among **ardent supporters**, less than a half welcome the Wagner Group deployment.

Figure 9. Attitude to the statement “I welcome the deployment of the Wagner Group soldiers in Belarus”



There are several statements about the Wagner Group before you. How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?

This suggests that regime propagandists have failed to “sell” the Wagner Group to Belarusians, despite the Belarusian security forces and the military making several trips to the Wagner camp and media pictures of Belarusian soldiers training with Wagner Group’s soldiers. This attitude towards the Wagner Group can also explain the negative (regime-wise) dynamics in the Social Conflict Segmentation. We suppose that the deployment of the Wagner Group should be interpreted as going against the anti-war consensus, leading to a more cautious attitude towards the regime even among those who are inclined to trust it.

6 STATE AND SOCIETY

The main trends concerning the operation of the repressive system have continued, and the leaders of law enforcement agencies confirm they have no intention of ending repressions. Control over the public sphere is tightening, and besides demonstrating “repentance” and condemning “extremism”, people are now required to approve of the regime's policy in public if they wish to avoid punishment. The authorities are taking measures to create a new form of serfdom – the personal subordination of certain social or professional groups. In the cultural and historical sphere, the main enemy is any manifestation of the Belarusian identity and its main symbol, Kastus Kalinousky. The activist boom in diasporas, which began in the spring, maintains its scale for now, focusing on political prisoners.

REPRESSIONS

Fine-tuned over the years, the Lukashenka regime's system of repressions keeps on working. In fact, all the trends that concern it and were described in the previous issues of the Belarus Change Tracker are still relevant. Solidarity with Ukraine and participation in the events of the Belarusian revolution of 2020-2021 continue to be the main reasons for detentions and re-arrests¹²⁷. People are detained both individually and as families. The pressure on relatives also persists (focusing on the families of journalists, well-known politicians and Belarusian volunteers fighting in Ukraine) and there is ongoing persecution of certain professional groups (mainly lawyers and journalists). During the reporting period, repressions particularly affected priests in the Catholic and Protestant churches.

The so-called “khapuny” (mass detentions) persist, both at people's places of residence (with Homiel and Mahiliou leading in terms of the number of people) and at work. In the latter case, the sporadic boost in detentions and dismissals for political reasons is associated with the initiatives of newly appointed officials who used to work in law enforcement agencies (the Ministry of Internal Affairs or the KGB). There are also ongoing “clean-ups” in the professional environment (for example, qualification exams for lawyers aiming at depriving professionals unloyal to the authorities of their working licences)¹²⁸.

Detentions at the border continue. Increased controls have resulted in dozens of Belarusians being persecuted for political reasons after searching the content on their mobile phones. In June alone, at least 36 returnees were convicted after being detained at the border¹²⁹.

In places of detention, the pressure on political prisoners persists and is even increasing. There is a new emerging trend here – the use of punitive psychiatry, when political prisoners are sent for compulsory examinations or treatment in psychiatric clinics (as in the cases of Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk, Uladzimir Kondrus, Valeryi Yarotski, Ihar Papou). Due to targeted pressure and intentionally unbearable conditions in places of detention, in the summer of 2023 the threat to human health and life has increased. It also became known that several people had died in prison. The most well-covered case is of the famous Belarusian artist and activist Ales Pushkin, who died because he had not been provided with timely medical care behind bars¹³⁰.

¹²⁷ Выглядае на тое, што звычайна падставамі для затрыманняў з'яўляюцца лічбавыя адбіткі, што пакідаюць людзі. Але здараецца і так, што штуршком для затрыманняў становяцца медыйныя імпрэзы тыпу з'яўлення на канале Delfi стужкі аб пратэстах 2020 года, пасля чаго сілавікамі, па іх словах, было ідэнтыфікавана больш за 10 чалавек.

¹²⁸ «Падтвердзіліся все опасения». Юристы массово заваливают новый экзамен Минюста – что происходит? // Зеркало, август 2023

¹²⁹ Мінімум 36 асуджаных пасля затрымання на мяжы: вынікі адміністрацыйнага пераследу ў чэрвені // Вясна, ліпень 2023

¹³⁰ Алесь Пушкін // Вясна, 2023

In general, the ongoing character of repressions is quite natural, since this is a conscious policy of the Belarusian authorities, confirmed by a number of interviews given by the security forces officials in the summer¹³¹¹³²¹³³. As a result of the policy's implementation, in the three summer months at least 948 people were detained, 90 people were declared extremists, 69 people were recognised as political prisoners.

STRENGTHENING THE CONTROL SYSTEM

Repressions should be considered as part of a larger system the Belarusian regime uses to control and suppress society. The efforts of the authorities to expand this system were described in previous issues of the Belarus Change Tracker. However, there are several directions to this main trend.

First is the regulatory level. Here, the most important thing to pay attention to is the “Concept of Legal Policy” approved in June, which makes it possible to restrict human rights “in the interests of national security”. Three more regulatory issues to follow are: a) the prepared draft of amendments to the Housing Code, which will considerably restrict the rights of apartment owners' associations; b) the draft law “On automobile transport of passengers” submitted for public discussion, which will authorise the surveillance of taxi passengers. Although the draft has not been adopted yet, video cameras are already being installed in taxi cars (such measures are reportedly being taken in Hrodna, at least)¹³⁴; c) the signing of the decree “On measures to counter unauthorised payment transactions”¹³⁵, which will eliminate the concept of bank secrecy for the security forces.

Secondly, control over all kinds of organisations, groups and communities continues to expand. This happens both in a hidden way, for example via “offers of cooperation” (as in the cases of the Army, Air Force and Navy Volunteer Society DASAAF, airsoft or biker clubs) or by appointing former security officers to the management (see the section Militarisation: new special force units... for more details), as well as by direct restructuring of organisations, as has happened with OSVOD (the Belarusian Republican Society of Life-Saving on Water), whose head must now be directly approved by Lukashenka. In difficult cases, when it is hard to directly subordinate groups from an organisational perspective, the authorities consider such options as re-registration (or rather failure to re-register)¹³⁶ or additional certification of specialists¹³⁷.

Thirdly, under state pressure, there is an emerging tendency for people suspected of disloyalty being forced not just to disapprove of “extremism” but also to pledge loyalty to the regime. This is where officials from the administrations of state-owned companies, and some regime enthusiasts, are most active. Some organise open court sessions or make videos calling on viewers to condemn employees detained for political reasons. They may also force others to display red and green flags on buildings¹³⁸ or develop depersonalised uniforms for their employees and students. Others look out for any possible manifestations of dissent in universities, museums, the army and urban space.

¹³¹ [Карпянкоў заявіў, што гатовы пачаць паляванне на полк Каліноўскага](#) // Наша Ніва, чэрвень 2023

¹³² [«Они начнут работать против нас». Замначальника ГУБОПиК рассказал, почему не хочет останавливать репрессии](#) // Зеркало, август 2023

¹³³ [Галоўны міліцыянер Гродзеншчыны пра палітычныя рэпрэсіі: «Не было такога дня, каб мы кагосьці не прыцягвалі»](#) // Наша Ніва, жнівень 2023

¹³⁴ [Паводле інфармацыі Hrodna.life, у некаторых гродзенскіх таксі ўжо з'явіліся камеры відэаназірання](#) // Hrodna.life, чэрвень 2023

¹³⁵ [«Предоставление информации правоохранителям не является нарушением банковской тайны». Силовики получают супердоступ к платежам белорусов](#) // Зеркало, август 2023

¹³⁶ [Як гэта ўжо адбылося з палітычнымі партыямі і можа адбыцца з рэлігійнымі арганізацыямі. Гл. \[Перарэгістрацыя рэлігійных арганізацый можа прайсці ў Беларусі\]\(#\)](#) // Наша Ніва, чэрвень 2023

¹³⁷ [Власти взяли и за фитнес-инструкторов: теперь вы не сможете заниматься с самоучкой – тем более, если у него есть судимость за протесты](#) // Зеркало, август 2023

¹³⁸ [«Снимок сбросьте по факсу». Во Фрунзенском районе Минска от частных требуют высадить на территории цветы и вывесить флаг](#) // Зеркало, июль 2023

NEW SERFDOM

There are a number of measures in the control system that should be singled out because they are aimed at the personal subordination of certain social or professional groups.

First of all, operatives of the law enforcement agencies and civil servants are drawing attention. Special attention to them was highlighted in the previous issues of the Belarus Change Tracker. As mentioned previously, the authorities are developing various approaches to both ensure their loyalty and acquire additional tools to put pressure on them in case of possible disobedience.

Secondly, attention is given to educated people employed either in agriculture or in the presidential vertical. During one of his speeches, Lukashenka ordered a prohibition on them quitting or transferring to another job without the permission of the chairman of a district executive committee. Lukashenka put it this way: “Today, no specialist, no head of an agricultural company should be able to transfer to another job or quit without a decision of the chairman of a district executive committee. If they quit, no one in the country should be able to hire them until they submit a paper from their previous place of work, a good character assessment. And up the vertical. No chairman of a district executive committee and others in their district register should be able to quit”¹³⁹.

All those who intend, even potentially, to leave the country or cross its borders should also be added to these groups. Ordering an apostille stamp for official documents, submitting documents for a visa or receiving a Karta Polaka (Pole's Card) may rouse suspicions. As a consequence, people are scrutinised by competent bodies, whether administrations within enterprises (for preventive conversations), military enlistment offices (for conscription notices), or the police or KGB (for talks and control).

A particularly cynical aspect of denying the right to cross the Belarusian border is the Belarusian authorities blocking opportunities for rehabilitation abroad for children from the Chornobyl territories¹⁴⁰.

BELARUSIAN IDENTITY AS THE MAIN ENEMY

Supporters of the regime continue to consider any manifestations of what goes beyond the Soviet-Russian historical and cultural discourse a threat. The main enemy in this paradigm is any manifestation of Belarusian identity. During the summer, the repressive pressure put in this direction applied mainly to libraries, archives and museums.

Libraries were ordered to remove the works of Aleksievich, Bykau, Heniyush, Niakliayev and Arsenneva from the shelves (the books of the latter three, as well as some of Dunin-Martsinkevich's works, were recognised as “extremist”). Access to electronic libraries was also limited¹⁴¹. Archives suffer from intensified clean-ups intended to remove disloyal employees. Meanwhile, scandals erupt any time pro-government activists find in a museum anything carrying the Pahonia coat of arms, red-white-red colours or any recollection of the 1863 uprising against the Russian Empire.

In fact, the 1863-1864 uprising and its leader Kastus Kalinousky are the most denigrated issues in the history of 19th century Belarusian lands. Any reminders of them are closely monitored and then disappear: a panel with the image of Kalinousky was destroyed in the Belarusian State University's Faculty of History; a post office which Kalinousky's rebels used as a headquarters was destroyed near Baranavichy; a memorial sign honouring the rebels disappeared in Hrodna; and a biography of Kalinousky was removed from the Hrodna library system.

¹³⁹ [Лукашэнка: Ніхто ў калгасе не можа звольніцца без рашэння кіраўніка](#) // Наша Ніва, ліпень 2023

¹⁴⁰ [«Minsk blocca i bimbi di Chernobyl»: lo strazio delle famiglie pugliesi](#) // La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno, ліпень 2023

¹⁴¹ [Мининформ заблокировал онлайн-библиотеку белоруской литературы kamunikat](#) // Медиазона, июль 2023

The purpose of the government's efforts is to destroy, or at least conceal, any information that raises a problem of the “fraternal” nature of Belarusian-Russian relations. Instead, the authorities continue to promote the “Russian world” within which Kalinousky is depicted as a villain: the Deputy Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Alexey Shevtsov, compares Kalinousky to Stepan Bandera in Ukraine¹⁴². In the summer, acts of suppression against Belarusian identity included the cancellation of Belarusian saints in the Russian Orthodox Church, the change of Belarusian-language signs to Russian-language ones at the military cemetery in Minsk, adjustments introduced to guided tours and the purchase of literature about Russia and Moscow for libraries.

CIVIL SOCIETY

The boost in the Belarusian diaspora's activity, which began in the spring, continued in the summer. Solidarity with Belarus remains its main focus. However, in the summer, this focus became more specific and political prisoners were in the spotlight.

Belarusians abroad organised events dedicated to certain calendar dates and also reacted to the events that shocked Belarusian society. Among the many solidarity events were several dedicated to the memory of the artist and political prisoner Ales Pushkin, who died behind bars. Another spontaneous campaign was the display of Belarusian flags in house windows in Vilnius during the NATO summit, which was held in the Lithuanian capital on 11-12 July 2023.

Among the planned events, the most prominent was the Day of Solidarity with Belarus dedicated to the third anniversary of the start of the 2020-2021 protests. Representatives of the Belarusian diaspora from a number of European and American countries took part in the dedicated activities. Still, the biggest event of all during the summer was the fundraising marathon of solidarity, “Belarus, we care!”, which was organised to raise funds for the needs of political prisoners. Thirty independent media responded to the appeal by the representative of the United Transitional Cabinet for social affairs, and more than 500,000 euros were raised during the two-day marathon. The organisers noted that they were impressed with the amount collected as they did not count on such commitment from Belarusians. They also emphasised that both Belarusians abroad and those who remain in the country took part¹⁴³.

Fundraising during the marathon of solidarity with political prisoners is not the only example of Belarusian fundraising. In August Belarusians abroad raised funds for the treatment of political prisoner Vital Tyseu and helped the children of political prisoners prepare for school.

The problem of political prisoners was also the main issue on the agenda of newly established organisations. In June, the creation of an association of former Belarusian political prisoners, “Volny krok”, was announced. Another project, “Volnyia”, has been created to help former political prisoners adapt after release from prison.

The attempt at public self-organisation of Belarusian volunteers fighting in Ukraine is worth special attention. On 19-20 August, representatives of Belarusian volunteer formations and a number of civil and paramilitary organisations met in Kyiv. Remarkably, there were no representatives of the Kastus Kalinousky Regiment in attendance. The main results of the meeting were the organisation of a charity marathon to raise funds for the families of fallen Belarusians and social support for soldiers and their families¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴² У Савеце бяспекі Расіі ўступбаваліся постаццю Кастуся Каліноўскага // Еўрарадыё, жнівень 2023

¹⁴³ Наста Базар: «Людзі з Беларусі таксама знаходзілі спосабы далучыцца да марафона, прасілі сяброў і блізкіх па-за межамі краіны» // Салідарнасць, ліпень 2023

¹⁴⁴ «Не перасварыліся». У Кіеве прайшла закрытая сустрэча байцоў з усіх беларускіх фармаванняў, якія ваююць ва Украіне // Наша Ніва, жнівень 2023

TECHNICAL ANNEX

To analyse changes in public opinion, the Belarus Change Tracker team orders opinion surveys from two data providers. Data from the main provider are used to prepare the section “Trends in Public Opinion”. The secondary provider’s results are analysed to check whether the trends visible in the main provider’s data are reproduced and verified by the secondary data. This primarily applies to analysing segments of social conflict.

Previously, quota sampling was used to collect data. This involved mapping the structure of the internet- connected urban population of Belarus by gender, age, settlement size and education. From this issue onwards, the BCT team has abandoned quotas and is using simple random sampling aimed at reflecting the structure of the online panel.

Providers send out 25,000 invitations to random users and keep the survey open for seven days.

The resulting sample is not representative of the urban population of Belarus, but it is representative of the structure of the online panels.

The logic of the BCT survey is that significant changes or trends in society will be reflected in the survey population of 70–100,000 panellists. A random selection of a small sample of, say, 1,000 respondents and a weighting of the sample according to the online panel’s structure should also reflect these changes.

At the same time, we can confidently speculate about trends and phenomena within particular groups (segments) of society under study. Thus, the survey divides society into four segments, and it is reasonable to expect that the inherent features of a particular segment observed in the survey are also characteristic of this segment in the wider Belarusian society.

Data from previous BCT issues have also been re-weighted by the structure of the online panel. A possibility therefore remains that the differences observed between the present (fourth) issue and the first three issues are due to a change in the sampling approach.

FEAR FACTOR

While considering our data reliable and valid, we acknowledge that any data collected through surveys in Belarus should be treated with caution. The distribution of responses in the sample may be skewed by the context of repression by the Belarusian authorities, which add to respondents’ anxiety about answering sensitive questions.

For example, many respondents discontinued the survey when presented with a question about their approval of the activities of Alyaksandr Lukashenka and the Belarusian government. This leads to potential distortion of response distributions in the achieved sample towards “neutrality”, as well as to the “washout” of neutral respondents who may overreact to sensitive questions.

In the main provider’s data, one can observe a dropout rate (the ratio of those who completed the survey to those who started the survey) of 18%.

In addition, one should not ignore the nature of online surveys: the more economically and socially-active urban population engages with these far more often than other sectors of society, and, as a result, it can be assumed that support for Lukashenka’s policies in the sample may differ from the actual level of support.

Table 5. Main indicators of data collection

	Number of people	Percentage
A1. Invitations sent out	2500	
A2. Those who started to fill out the questionnaire	1241	
A3. Those who did not pass the screening section of the questionnaire	78	
A4. Those who dropped out of the survey after the screening section	208	
A5. Those who completed the survey	955	
Response rate (A2/A1)		5%
Dropout rate (A4/(A2-A3))		18%

Table 6 provides a comparison of the structures in the achieved sample, the invitations sent out, the main online panel and the urban population of Belarus with internet access.

Table 6. Social-demographic structure comparison

	Invitations sent out	Those who completed the survey	In the panel structure (target for re-weighting)	In the structure of urban residents with internet access
Age group				
18-24	29%	6%	11%	10%
25-34	35%	26%	26%	22%
35-44	23%	27%	29%	22%
45+	12%	41%	33%	45%
Gender				
Male	54%	53%	31%	44%
Female	46%	47%	69%	56%
Region				
Brest oblast	13%	15%	14%	12%
Vitebsk oblast	12%	13%	12%	12%
Gomel oblast	15%	18%	15%	14%
Hrodna oblast	11%	8%	11%	10%
Minsk oblast	15%	13%	15%	10%
Mogilev oblast	12%	13%	11%	11%
Minsk city	22%	19%	22%	31%

We have also made the data sets used in the study freely accessible on project’s website: bct.expert

SEGMENTS OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

The Social Conflict Segmentation (SCS) is based on the assessment of people’s confidence in both state and nonstate institutions, as well as in supporters and opponents of government. During data collection, respondents are asked to rate how much they trust or distrust certain groups, for example “the militia” or “people designated as political prisoners”. The analysis of these assessments allows us to divide Belarusian society into four groups according to their degree of trust or distrust in the

authorities: (i) ardent supporters, (ii) moderate supporters, (iii) moderate opponents and (iv) ardent opponents.

Almost half of society comprises moderate and ardent opponents and they tend not to trust the government structures. The other half is formed of moderate and ardent supporters. Both segments vary significantly in socio- demographic characteristics: the group of ardent opponents is dominated by men and people with higher levels of education, and representatives of this segment are more likely to live in Minsk and have higher incomes. By contrast, there are more women among the ardent supporters of the authorities. People in this group are generally less well-educated and have below average incomes. Ardent and moderate supporters demonstrate high confidence in pro-governmental institutions and those social groups that were singled out through factor analysis as “supportive of the authorities”.

Below is a list of institutions, people or groups of people that we asked the respondents to rate on a scale of “fully distrust – rather distrust – rather trust – fully trust”.

- Armed Forces;
- Police;
- Investigative Committee;
- Prosecutor’s Office;
- State Security Committee;
- State media;
- Non-state media;
- Government;
- Officials;
- Citizens of Belarus who emigrated in fear of prosecution at home;
- Participants in protests on the summer and autumn of 2020;
- People who do not trust the authorities;
- People who trust the authorities;
- Supporters of the current government;
- People who reject the results of the 2020 presidential election;
- People who recognise the results of the 2020 presidential election;
- People labelled political prisoners.

THE SIXTH ISSUE OF BELARUS CHANGE TRACKER

JUNE-AUGUST 2023

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