

PUBLIC STATEMENT OF VIEŠOJI ĮSTAIGA BEROC TYRIMŲ CENTRAS
(BEROC RESEARCH CENTER PUBLIC INSTITUTION)

TO THE LITHUANIAN PUBLIC

Why are we making this public statement?

The BEROC Research Center (Viešoji įstaiga BEROC tyrimų centras) has recently faced a wave of attacks and insinuations against itself and its key staff. We do not fully understand the motivation and nature of these phenomena. However, this is the first precedent of this kind in BEROC's 15-year-old history.

We have always worked following the principles of openness and transparency, thanks to which, dare we hope, we have gained credibility in the academic and research community, in the Belarusian civil society, as well as among our international partners.

We consider insinuations against BEROC as a precedent, which can turn into an extremely dangerous trend in relations between Lithuanian and Belarusian civil societies. We believe that such a tendency should be suppressed. We believe that the forces that do not want Belarus to become an independent democratic and Europe-oriented country benefit from such insinuations. In this regard, we would like to explain the goals and format of the activity of our organization in the Republic of Lithuania to the Lithuanian public.

First of all, we would like to emphasize our gratitude and great respect to Lithuania, its state institutions, civil society, and cultural and academic communities for supporting and assisting the democratic aspirations of Belarusians, for protecting those threatened by reprisals in their homeland, and for creating a favorable environment for businesses of Belarusian origin that have been forced to relocate from Belarus. All this prompted us — being in forced exile — to institutionalize our activities in Lithuania.

The current period — while the dictatorship supported by the aggressive imperial regime in Moscow maintains its stronghold in Belarus, while several thousand protesters are in prisons under the regime's pressure, and supporters of the democratic future of Belarus are subjected to reprisals — can and should be used productively despite its complexity. First, this is needed to save the human capital of Belarus. Second, this is needed to create the foundation of the future: a democratic Belarus in the European Union, which will be a reliable and friendly partner for its neighbors and, above all, for the closest of them — Lithuania, and not a satellite of Russia, dangerous for the region.

We believe that the relations of democratic Belarus with Lithuania are of utmost importance for the future of the entire region, its stable development and sustainable security. Therefore, in its current activities in Lithuania, our organization implements projects in the educational and research domains, as well as promotes the development of the business community. We are adamant that these activities are mutually beneficial already today both for the Belarusian civil society and the Lithuanian society, and the country in general.

What is BEROC Research Center (Viešoji įstaiga BEROC tyrimų centras), and what does it do in Lithuania?

BEROC (Belarusian Economic Research and Outreach Center) is a Belarusian research center established in partnership with and under the patronage of the Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics (SITE) in 2008.

BEROC defined its mission as promoting the development of the market economy in Belarus by creating a public dialog based on economic analysis and high-quality expertise; promoting international academic values through research and educational programs in the field of international-level

economics. In practice, this meant promoting the democratic transformation of Belarus through the domain of economics and business to introduce contemporary standards of market economy and economic policy, the rule of law, human rights and freedoms, and democracy in the country.

As of 2020, BEROC covered a significant part of this pathway, transforming the social environment in Belarus through economic research and education, as well as through private sector development. We have maximized our contribution to the rapprochement and strengthening of Belarus' interconnections with the European Union through the relevant areas.

The experience of our partners from academic research centers similar to BEROC, which were also established in Poland (CenEA), Latvia (BICEPS at SSE-Riga), Ukraine (Kyiv School of Economics), and Georgia (ISET) in partnership and under the patronage of SITE, indicated that we were on the right track. BEROC's many years of activity contributed to the demand of the Belarusian people for democratic transit of power, which led to unprecedented peaceful protests in Belarus in 2020. As known, the will of the people was opposed by the Belarusian authorities through brutal violence, mass reprisals against civil society, and support for the full-scale aggression of imperial Russia against Ukraine.

In a situation of an acute political crisis after the rigged elections and unprecedented violence in suppressing protests, despite the fact that the center's professional expertise is out of politics, BEROC clearly stated its standing: commitment to the democratic transit of power in Belarus. Mr. Pavel Daneyko, the Center's Administrative Director, and Mr. Dzmitry Kruk, Senior Researcher, along with 40 other reputable representatives of civil society, joined the Coordination Council (Belarus) on the day of its founding on August 20, 2020; the Coordination Council was established at the initiative of Ms. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as a representative body to overcome the political crisis and protect the sovereignty and independence of Belarus.

Starting from August 2020 already, the BEROC's researchers emphasized in their public comments that the forceful suppression of democratic transit was a way into the imperial embrace of Russia and a dead end to the prospects of developing independent Belarus. Many of the center's employees, in addition, assisted democratic transit in other ways.

After suppressing the active phase of the protests in 2021, the regime started purging civil society. BEROC and its staff were among the first to be attacked by the regime. Repressions and threats prompted some of the center's key employees to leave Belarus in May-July 2021. The apotheosis of the repressive campaign in July 2021 was the search of BEROC's office and employees' homes, as well as the forced liquidation of BEROC as a legal entity in Belarus. The regime de jure forcefully liquidated 1,200+ civil society organizations operating in Belarus until the summer of 2021.

None of the BEROC employees was arrested only because they had already left Belarus by that time. After the forced relocation, BEROC continued its operations in 2021-2022 in Ukraine under a cooperation agreement with its partner organization: the Kyiv School of Economics.

The outbreak of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and the direct danger to the life and health of the staff and their families (some of them resided in Bucha and Irpen, Ukraine) prompted BEROC to relocate again. After the war outbreak in 2022, the BEROC staff found themselves in various countries neighboring Ukraine. This complicated the Center's operations, but our researchers continued preparing their high-quality expertise even in these conditions.

The organization faced the issue of new institutionalization and registration of its legal entity. Having discussed it within the organization, it was decided to choose Vilnius as a new central location of BEROC's activities and to register a new legal entity in Lithuania. The choice of Lithuania and the city of Vilnius as the new location for BEROC was due to the deep understanding of the challenges of Belarus by the Lithuanian public and the Lithuanian authorities, due to their readiness to support

democratic aspirations of Belarusians, due to great prospects for developing bilateral relations after the democratic transit of power in Belarus and on the way of Belarus' accession to the EU, due to geographical, cultural and historical proximity of Lithuania and Belarus, due to the already-existing and established institutional basis for education and research (European Humanities University (EHU)), and due to our friendly attitude towards Lithuania.

We registered a public institution — Viešoji įstaiga BEROC tyrimų centras — in Lithuania in the second half of 2022. Now, it is the only hub for all our activities, and it is the successor of the BEROC Research Center. In 2023, having opened a current bank account, we started implementing all necessary procedures in accordance with Lithuanian laws (migration, labor recruitment, etc.) in order to concentrate all our activities under the aegis of this new legal entity. We expect to complete all the above procedures by late 2023 — early 2024.

By now, we have managed to restore the scale of the research and educational activities that are standard for BEROC. Moreover, we have been expanding proactively. Currently, we are working on a very important project to be implemented together with the European Humanities University: launching the BEROC-IPM School of Economics and Business (BISEB) as a branch of the University.

We plan to offer a bachelor's program — Business Economics — within BISEB, as well as a range of various educational business programs. We expect that once implemented, these steps will become a qualitative breakthrough in the domain of Belarusian economic and business education.

In addition to professional activities, our employees have been actively involved in civic activities aimed at promoting democratic transit in Belarus. At the initiative of BEROC, we have launched a platform for discussing the future of democratic Belarus — the Bank of Ideas (ideasbank.vision) — in cooperation with other Belarusian research centers. The relations with Lithuania are one of the most important for the Belarusian future, and the development of the Belarusian-Lithuanian scientific and academic discourse is of key importance in this context. We have been actively cooperating with businesses relocated from Belarus and with other actors in this domain. In addition, our employees have been engaged in the operations of Belarusian democratic forces.

Two BEROC representatives — Mr. Pavel Daneyko and Mr. Dzmitry Kruk — are still members of the Coordination Council, a collegial body of Belarusian democratic forces and civil society. Our employees support the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, as well as other actors of the Belarusian democratic forces, through consultations on economic issues and other topics.

We hope this brief description gives a proper understanding of the objectives and format of the activities of Viešoji įstaiga BEROC tyrimų centras. However, you can find out more details of all the activities of our center. Please find a more detailed description of the BEROC activities attached to this public statement.

What claims are made against BEROC?

The activities of our organization and our Administrative Director, Mr. Pavel Daneyko, have been attacked for unclear reasons.

Attacks against Mr. Pavel Daneyko have probably become an additional leverage to attack the organization. These attacks have been based on two facts interpreted specifically. Since, nevertheless, some factual basis is involved in this case, we find it necessary to provide relevant explanations. We unequivocally dismiss all other disguised attacks as insinuations not based on any facts (even in a biased interpretation) and having nothing to do with reality.

Fact #1. Mr. Pavel Daneyko's unflattering remarks about Lithuania in 2019

Indeed, this fact occurred; and records of this Mr. Daneyko's expression can be found online. Firstly, we, as an organization, and Mr. Daneyko, as an individual, wish to state that we have regretted this fact and the tone of this expression. We assure that despite the sharpness and resonance of the expression, it in no way has meant and does not mean any negative attitude towards Lithuania. Mr. Daneyko apologizes to all Lithuanians who may have been offended by his words. Recognizing that the context of this expression does not negate its unflattering nature, we nevertheless urge you to understand its context.

In 2019, Belarusian civil society considered it strategically important to intensify relations with the EU under the Eastern Partnership. This position was based on the premise that the period of forced authoritarian (slow and contradictory) modernization could be used to reduce Belarus's dependence on Russia and lay an institutional foundation for the subsequent development of relations with the EU. An extremely important and acute item on the Lithuanian agenda was the issue of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). Being aware of the existential criticality of the NPP safety issue for Lithuania (as well as for Belarus), the Belarusian civil society predominantly believed that the most realistic way to address this issue could be the involvement of the dictator in institutional relations with the EU as a first step. Subsequently, a corresponding outcome could be achieved in the development of these relations. Another tactical line of behavior prevailed among some Lithuanian politicians, which implied pressure on Lukashenko's regime by blocking Belarus from joining the Eastern Partnership treaties.

This tactical dispute about the best way of achieving the goals shared by Lithuania and the democratic society of Belarus was quite hot. At the same time, both of them understood well that the poignancy of this issue and even possible tensions in relations due to this issue were in no way a threat to the strategic focus on friendship and cooperation between the civil societies of our two countries.

That was the background of the round table in 2019 where Mr. Pavel Daneyko expressed himself. It was a private round table (no media outlets were expected; the event participants found out that there were journalists only in the aftermath of the event) attended by politicians and civil activists from Belarus, Lithuania, and other EU countries. The event format implied a private and non-public exchange of opinions on this acute issue. Mr. Daneyko spoke out very provocatively and sharply, being aware of the private event format. He saw an opportunity to deliver his opinion personally to his Lithuanian friends and partners in the ongoing tactical dispute. Yes, of course, resorting to such rhetoric does not make the speaker look good and may offend the addressees. Back then, Mr. Daneyko expected this rhetoric would help deliver his message to Lithuanian partners, conveying the importance of this issue for Belarus. It was very likely that all Lithuanian partners, despite the provocative nature of the expression, realized this context at that moment and the fact that this expression in no way compromised Mr. Daneyko's good personal attitude towards Lithuania and Lithuanian-Belarusian cooperation.

Mr. Daneyko's great respect for Lithuania has been proven by his numerous media interviews and publications. None of them (apart from the above-mentioned expression) has anything negative about Lithuania. On the contrary, there are numerous testimonies of Mr. Daneyko expressing his friendly attitude and emphasizing the successful practices of Lithuania and the strong qualities of Lithuanian businesses and Lithuanian civil society (e.g., see: <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/news/live/medlitolnye-sderzhannye-no-empatichnye-kakimi-belorusy-vidyat-litovcev-91443657>; https://xn--d1ag.xn--e1a4c/pub/arche/html/2007-knihi/8_bnentr_ru.htm). Moreover, what the person does is probably the best indicator of his/her real attitude. Mr. Daneyko was a key BEROB staff member who proposed to relocate the organization specifically to Lithuania. In addition, many businesses have decided to relocate to Lithuania in recent years also upon consultations with Mr. Daneyko: as the founder of the IPM Business School and the long-time Administrative Director of BEROB, Mr. Daneyko enjoys great authority among Belarusian businesses.

Fact #2. Mr. Pavel Daneyko as an independent director in the Belgazprombank Board of Directors in 2018-2022

On the wave of insinuations, this fact has been presented as alleged evidence of Mr. Pavel Daneyko's ties with Russia. Indeed, Belgazprombank is a bank with Russian equity (its key shareholders are Gazprom and Gazprombank). However, the Russian shareholders had been treating this bank exclusively as an economic asset for many years, not attempting to influence politics or any other domains through the bank's activities. Mr. Viktor Babariko,¹ Chairperson of the bank in 2000-2020, was its key strategic decision-maker de facto for all these years. During Mr. Viktor Babariko's chairmanship, Belgazprombank was the leader in the Belarusian banking market not only in terms of profitability, but also, more importantly, in terms of technology and innovation, as well as in its cooperation with private businesses. The bank actively cooperated with Western partners, including international financial institutions. For example, this bank was one of the key participants in the EBRD's (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) program to support small and medium enterprises in the country. The bank proactively introduced innovative practices and tools, becoming a technological pioneer in the Belarusian financial market.

The Belarusian authorities began to introduce independent directorship into the corporate governance of banks in the second half of the 2010s.² In this context, Belgazprombank invited Mr. Pavel Daneyko to join its Board of Directors (Supervisory Board) as an independent director in 2018 because of Mr. Daneyko's authority in the Belarusian business community and his focus on innovation. Given the strong image and reputation of both the bank itself and its Chairman of the Board (Mr. Viktor Babariko), Mr. Daneyko accepted the offer. In 2018-2020, Mr. Daneyko contributed to the development of the bank and to strengthening its strategic advantages in the Belarusian financial market. As an independent director, he cooperated fruitfully and effectively with Mr. Viktor Babariko, the bank's Chairman of the Board.

After Mr. Viktor Babariko was not registered as a presidential candidate and was detained, Mr. Daneyko remained in the Board of Directors. His key motivation for this was to help the bank preserve its foundation (its team and corporate practices) that had been laid by Mr. Viktor Babariko, as well as to prevent the regime's repressive bodies from abusing facts and data on the bank's activities to cover up the political persecution of Mr. Viktor Babariko. Charges against Mr. Viktor Babariko had been uncertain until mid-2021.

Mr. Daneyko attended the Board of Directors Meeting in early 2021 for the last time. Mr. Daneyko has not attended any Board of Directors Meetings since he left Belarus in July 2021. Mr. Daneyko's de jure mandate as an independent director on the Board of Directors expired on February 28, 2022. Media publications in June 2023 saying that Mr. Daneyko had ceased to be an independent director only recently were not true. Possibly, mass media came to that conclusion because Belgazprombank updated its website and the relevant page about its Board of Directors at the time of the publications.

Using the fact that Mr. Daneyko was an independent director in Belgazprombank in 2018-2022 as an alleged indicator of some connection with Russia does not stand up to any criticism and demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of Belarusian realities in that period in the past. We hereby assure that Mr. Pavel Daneyko has never had and does not have any business or political ties with the Russian authorities. All of Mr. Daneyko's activities, his statements and, most importantly, his

¹ In 2020, Viktor Babariko became a presidential pre-candidate who had the highest opinion poll rating. He has been detained since June 2020.

² This position implied engagement in strategic prioritizing of the bank's operations, and monitoring implementation of the bank strategy mainly through attending the Board of Directors Meetings (2 times a year on average). In other words, it was not a full-time position.

actions throughout his career unambiguously testify to his commitment to the ideals of an independent democratic Belarus based on European values.

Our next steps

We declare that we see no reason to doubt that the activities of Viešoji įstaiga BEROC tyrimų centras and the officials of the organization are based on fundamental European values and aimed at bringing the benefit of developing human capital both to Belarus and Lithuania, as well as at the development of strategic cooperation between our countries and full realization of the potential for bilateral economic relations. We believe that Lithuania will have Belarus as its reliable and predictable neighbor, and we are working on this together with our Lithuanian colleagues.

We are grateful to Lithuania and Lithuanians for their support and protection of our organization, its staff and democratically oriented Belarusians, for their principled position on the issue of the joint future of Belarus and Lithuania as two equal and close partners, for their long-term support provided to the Belarusian democratic movement. We are determined to cooperate with Lithuania, its state and public institutions, mass media, and citizens to remove impediments — including provocations and insinuations in the media — on the pathway to this future.

We are guided by these principles and we will remain guided by them in our research and educational activities in the domain of economics and business in Lithuania.