



# BELARUS CONFLICT RISK ASSESSMENT 2020

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# BACKGROUND

- 1991: Independence from Russia
- 1994 – Present: Alexander Lukashenko holds on to power
- “Europe’s last dictator”
- Balancing between the West and Russia
- August 2020 Elections

# STAKEHOLDERS



## PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder	Analysis
Ruling Party / Alexander Lukashenko	<p><b>Relationship:</b> Current President, in power since 1994; generally pro-Russian although recently appears to be divided and support the EU</p> <p><b>Power:</b> Ultimately the most powerful player; controls the internal apparatus and the economy</p> <p><b>Agenda:</b> a) the restoration of the old Soviet economic system with only marginal market economic reforms; b) gradual increase of political repression; and c) close relations with Russia though recently divided</p> <p><b>Needs:</b> Appeal to the EU and Russia's pressure for reform while remaining in power</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> Oppression of the media; violence against civilians; poll results manipulation</p>

## PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder	Analysis
Svetlana Tikhanovskaya	<p><b>Relationship:</b> Leader of opposition and of the Coordination Council; Positive relationship with opposition and protesters.</p> <p><b>Power:</b> Power disparity vs regime; Forced to flee into exile in Lithuania</p> <p><b>Agenda:</b> Contests election results as unfair and not free; Release of political prisoners</p> <p><b>Needs:</b> Good faith negotiations with the regime; New elections monitored by the OSCE; International support</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> Ran against Lukashenko in August (10% of vote); Contested the vote count; Created the Coordination Council; Called for negotiation between parties + EU</p>

## PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder	Analysis
Other Opposition Members	<p><b>Relationship:</b> Support/endorse Tikhanovaska; Conflicting relationship with the regime; Many imprisoned or forced to exile</p> <p><b>Power:</b> Involvement in small-scale protests; Generation of popular support for their cause; Vulnerable to internal repression</p> <p><b>Agenda:</b> Advocate for the removal of Lukashenko; Transition to liberal democracy</p> <p><b>Needs:</b> A strong rule of law and freedom of expression/assembly</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> Some joined the Coordination Council; Participated in protests; Arrested; Exiled</p>

## SECONDARY STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder	Analysis
Russia	<p><b>Relationship:</b> Traditional Ally; Positive relationship up until 2015; Colder relations due to Russian geopolitical interests (2015-2020)</p> <p><b>Power:</b> Asymmetrical economic and security relations; Significant influence on Belarussian elites</p> <p><b>Agenda:</b> Strengthening geopolitical and economic interests; Maintain a level of disorder in Belarus</p> <p><b>Needs:</b> Limit influence/pressure of the EU; Lukashenko to step down; Continuation of pro-Russian government</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> Promised financial and military aid; Requested constitutional reforms; Stepped up military drills</p>

## SECONDARY STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholder	Analysis
European Union	<p><b>Relationship:</b> Operate within balancing dynamic; Eastern Partnership; Belarus is an outcast in Europe</p> <p><b>Power:</b> Limited to economics (i.e., sanctions, transfers, trade); 2<sup>nd</sup> largest trading partner</p> <p><b>Agenda:</b> Strengthening bilateral ties; Accommodate Belarus' transition into the rules-based order</p> <p><b>Needs:</b> Belarus need to diversify foreign and economic relations; EU needs to engage Russia's neighbors to prevent a Ukraine 2.0</p> <p><b>Actions:</b> Imposition of sanctions; Condemns the election and crackdown on protesters</p>



# CONFLICT SCENARIOS

## Best-case Scenario

- Peaceful protests ramp up
- Economic recession continues to encourage revolt
- Conflict gains international attention through media
- Coordination Council is empowered by EU & US
- Russia is convinced that Lukashenko is now a liability to the regime
- A disempowered Lukashenko gives in to the demands of the Coordination Council
- Political prisoners are released and free and fair elections, monitored by the OSCE, are held

## Worst- Case Scenario

- Deepening recession resulting from the pandemic has worsened the already destabilized Belarussian economy and the country is now facing high levels of inflation.
- Protests turn into a blood shed between pro-regime forces and civilians
- Russia abandons its support for Lukashenko recognizing the increasing liability he poses
- Lukashenko is imprisoned and a new Russian-groomed President is put in power
- The EU provides disengaged support but lacks the willingness to directly intervene
- Russia capitalizes on the power vacuum left by the fall of Lukashenko

# CONFLICT SCENARIOS

## **Most Likely Scenario**

- The conflict forces a *détente* of bilateral relations between Minsk and Moscow
- Russian military and financial aid is ramped up due to Moscow's concerns over its Eastern European borders
- Recognizing Lukashenko as a liability, efforts are made to transition power to a more amenable/weakened pro-Russian president.
- As economic stability somewhat returns due to Russian assistance, protest levels lessen
- Remaining protests are increasingly repressed due to the ongoing pandemic combined with Belarus and Russian security forces efforts.
- Minsk is now further integrated into the Russian apparatus.

# GOVERNANCE & POLITICAL STABILITY

## **Stabilizing Factors:**

- Moderate levels of corruption and ineffectiveness, strong improvements over the last 5 years.
- Moderate stabilizing trend.

## **Destabilizing Factors:**

- Consistently autocratic regime, difficult for citizens to exercise civil liberties, very difficult to exercise political rights.
- Consistently high level of state control over traditional press, moderate level of control over digital media.
- Citizens have little opportunity to influence the government outside of demonstrations.
- Extremely low public trust in Lukashenko, arrests and violence against protestors, contested election.
- Moderate destabilizing trend.



**High  
Risk**

# ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

## **Stabilizing Factors:**

- Access to cheap energy sources through Russia
- Recent trade and financial aid agreements with Russia

## **Destabilizing Factors:**

- High than average levels of sustained inflation
- Economic contraction due to Covid-19 pandemic
- Calls for General Strike/Protest by opposition parties



**Med  
Risk**

# MILITARIZATION

## Stabilizing Factors:

- Close relationship with Russia
- Membership in Russian-led CSTO
- Geography (landlocked)
- Economic recession of 2014-16.

## Destabilizing Factors:

- Reliance on a strong internal security apparatus to maintain its power monopoly domestically
- Dominance of NATO in the neighbourhood.



Med  
Risk

# INTERNATIONAL LINKAGES

## **Stabilizing Factors:**

- Economic recession 2014-16/ Asymmetrical economic relationship with Russia.
- Fear of Russia's geopolitical ambitions
- Accession to the WTO process.
- Negotiation role in Donbas.

## **Destabilizing Factors:**

- Close relationship with Russia
- Competing interests of powerful internal actors.
- Belarus' track record of human rights
- Lack of free and fair elections
- Russian foreign policy interests
- Washington's absence from the conflict



**Med  
Risk**

# HISTORY OF ARMED CONFLICT

## **Stabilizing Factors:**

- Low level of fatalities.
- Riots and violence against civilians declining since their peak in August 2020.
- Election, dispute over the election, and intimidation of opposition all occurred in August.
- Strong stabilizing trend.

## **Destabilizing Factors:**

- Moderate, increasing number of stateless persons.
- Low, increasing number of refugees.
- Relatively less important factors in a crisis without a strong ethnic component.
- Weak destabilizing trend.



Low  
Risk

# POPULATION HETEROGENEITY

## **Stabilizing Factors:**

- Homogenous: 85% Belarusian, 7.5% Russian, 1.6% Ukrainian
- Christian Orthodox/nonreligious
- 0 Regions with concentration of non-Belarusians
- Generally pro-Russian regime
- Pacifist population

## **Destabilizing Factors:**

- None



Low  
Risk



# DEMOGRAPHIC STRESS

## Stabilizing Factors:

- Low population density, 47 ppl per square km
- Suburbanization around Minsk making up for decreasing rural population
- Most urbanized post-Soviet country

## Destabilizing Factors:

- One single urban centre—Minsk
- High urban population concentrated in Minsk—21% of total population



Low  
Risk

# ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS

## Stabilizing Factors:

- Increasing reforestation rates
- Low rate of population per sq.km. of arable land—167; among the lowest
- Access to 3589 cubic meters of renewable water sources; mid-range

## Destabilizing Factors:

- None



Low  
Risk

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

## **Stabilizing Factors:**

- Access to drinking water is practically universal
- Universal Primary and Secondary school enrollment
- Decreasing infant mortality rate
- Moderately high life expectancy

## **Destabilizing Factors:**

- Access to sanitation is significantly lower than regional average
- Effects of Covid-19 pandemic as of yet: unassessed.

