

One-day conference in Warsaw organized by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Belarus and the WMCES, in cooperation with the Ideas Bank Platform.

THE STRATEGIC RELEVANCE OF A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE FOR BELARUS AND THE EU

Wednesday, October 18, 2023

InterContinental Warsaw (Emilii Plater 49)

Working Language: English

BACKGROUND

Its pervasive dependence on Russia has driven Belarus to the abyss. A convincing Western alternative needs to be prepared. United Europe will be more secure, more sustainable, more prosperous with Belarus returning to „the family“. The groundwork for this starts in the minds of the people and decision makers, but also requires concrete preparations.

THE AIMS OF THE CONFERENCE-WORKSHOP:

- To identify the current and foreseeable interests of the EU towards Belarus; the interests of (pro-democratic) Belarus(ians) towards the EU and ways to match them in the best possible way
- To work out a clear narrative and convincing messaging on the European character of Belarus and the strategic relevance of its „European perspective“ (for both sides) as a credible and attractive geopolitical alternative
 - A) for decision makers in the EU (and broader West)
 - B) for Belarusians at home
- To identify key fields in which pro-democratic Belarusians and Western decision makers can take concrete action to
 - A) make the European alternative more practicable and credible
 - B) prepare for a „window of opportunity“ (support mechanisms etc)
 - C) empower pro-democratic Belarusians in exile and overcome existing challenges.

The event receives financial support from the European Parliament. The sole responsibility lies with the organizer, the European Parliament is not responsible for the event.

Programme

09:00 - 09:30 Registration and coffee

09:30 - 09:50 Opening reflections 'Why does Belarus (still) matter?'

- Jakob Wöllenstein, KAS Belarus
- Jaroslaw Pietras, WMCES
- Ryhor Astapenia, CNI

09:50 - 11:30 Session 1: Formulating a positive narrative around „European Belarus“ based on mutual values and interests of the EU and Belarus

Many Western decision makers admit that Belarus has again disappeared from their „mental map“ and it is barely considered independently in reflections on the post-war order. There has to be a sync of interests of pro-democratic Belarusians and Western decision makers to reach a strong, joint positive narrative around European Belarus.

Part a) EU-input: Strategic interests of the EU that can connect to Belarus

Security and military questions for the region – status of Belarus after the war and its role as an EU-border country, possibility of economic and energy support by EU countries to reduce the dependence from Russia. Points of interest of the EU that could be met by Belarus.

- Kamil Kłysiński, OSW
- Remigijus Šimašius, Centenary Policy Institute
- Alena Kudzko, GLOBSEC

Part b) Belarusian input: strategic interests that connect to the EU

What assumptions can be made today about foreseeable needs and interests of a free and democratic Belarus in fields like foreign policy, security, energy, finances, society, mobility or economics? How do they connect to the EU?

- Andrej Kazakevich, Palitychna Sfera
- Dzmitry Kruk, BEROC
- Victoria Leukavets

Chair: Pavel Slunkin, ECFR

Format: 5-7 min input per speaker, following by a 30-min open discussion

Programme

11:30 - 12:00 **Coffee break**

12:00 - 12:45 **Joint workshop – Introductory part**

How to build a convincing joint narrative: summarizing previous discussions and defining the framework for future workshops. Inputs, wording, formulation based on the interests identified in the morning about the European Perspective of Belarus? What are key motives, areas and topics that should be highlighted? What should be avoided?

Chair: Jakob Wöllenstein, KAS

12:45 - 13:45 **Lunch**

13:45 - 15:00 Two parallel workshops:
Preparing for a better future now / Concrete areas of engagement

Topic 1) Preparing for the Window of Opportunity

Brainstorm about the following questions:

- What are the key questions/decisions to be taken in preparation of a sudden „window of opportunity“?
- Which areas of engagement are crucial?
- Which political mechanisms, legal frameworks have to be in place?
- Which formats are needed to prepare this?
- What kind of resources should be made available to support a change?
- How to identify the “window of opportunity”?
- When will change in Belarus be genuine?

Initial inputs:

- Andrei Yahorau
- Artem Shraibman
- Jaroslaw Pietras

Chair: Ryhor Astapenia, CNI

Programme

13:45 - 15:00 Topic 2) Emigration: how to use its potential?

According to various studies the number of Belarusian moving westwards, mainly Poland and Lithuania, reached the level of up to 300 thousand people. What potential do they bring with regard to laying groundwork for a "European Perspective" of Belarus and are they in a position to use their fully use it? What are the obstacles and how to solve them?

The discussion should reflect on the different "branches" of groups and organisations in exile (political forces, NGOs, business, students, simple" Belarusians etc – each group needs their own „strategy“).

Initial Input:

- Palina Brodik (Free Belarus Center),
- Olga Dryndova (European Network for Belarus),
- Łukasz Byrski

Chair: Philip Bikanau

15:00 - 15:15 Coffee Break

15:15 - 16:30 Two parallel Workshops: Convincing public opinion

Topic 1: Public Opinion in Belarus

The Russian and Belarusian state-controlled media outlets went all-in. What can the Belarusian and Western media propose to withstand an increasing influence from the government's institutions and win the battle for minds – to show people in Belarus that the West can and wants to be a geopolitical alternative to Russia (with messages and concrete ideas of support / cooperation in case of changes)? What should be the main messages and tactics for dissemination?

- Nasta Kastuhova, Stratcom Lab
- Andrei Vardamatski
- Philip Bikanau

Chair: Anton Radnianskou, CNI

Programme

15:15 - 16:30 **Topic 2: How to keep attention of Belarus in the West and improve the perception of Belarus as a European neighbour?**

During the discussion to formulate the main target groups, messages and channels.

- Anais Marin, Chatham House
- Kamil Kłysiński, OSW
- Jakob Wöllenstein, KAS
- Victoria Leukavets, SCEEUS

Chair: Olga Dryndova, European Network for Belarus

16:30 - 16:45 **Coffee Break**

16:45 - 18:00 **Collaborative Discussion - Concluding Phase**

Which are the key takeaways of the conference. This segment involves presenting the workshop's conclusions and determining which messages should be conveyed to various stakeholders, outlining key steps.

Chair: Jakob Wöllenstein, Ryhor Astapenia, Anton Radnianskou, Olga Dryndova, Philip Bikanau, Pavel Slunkin

18:00 - 20:00 **Closed Reception**

Individual Departure of Participants

22:35 **Flight to Vilnius (for Participants from Lithuania)**