

UA: UKRAINE ANALYTICA

Issue 2 (40), 2026

NUCLEAR USA SUPER EU
INTERDEPENDENCE COALITION
AGGRESSION SUPER-POWER UKRAINE
ARCHITECTURE
INTEGRATION HEGEMONY
COMPLEX CHINA DYNAMICS
RUSSIA STRUCTURAL REVISIONIST
BALANCING

- REGIONAL DYNAMICS
- LESSONS LEARNED
- STRATEGIC BALANCE

SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Editors

Dr. Hanna Shelest
Dr. Mykola Kapitonenko

Publisher:

Published by NGO «Promotion of Intercultural Cooperation» (Ukraine),
Centre of International Studies (Ukraine), with the financial support of the
Representation of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Ukraine

UA: Ukraine Analytica is the first Ukrainian analytical journal in English
on International Relations, Politics and Economics. The journal is aimed
at experts, diplomats, academics, students interested in the international
relations and Ukraine in particular.

Contacts:

website: <http://ukraine-analytica.org/>
e-mail: Ukraine_analytica@ukr.net
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ukraineanalytica>
Twitter: https://twitter.com/UA_Analytica

The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors
and do not necessarily reflect the position of UA: Ukraine Analytica,
its editors, Board of Advisors or donors.

ISSN 2518-7481

500 copies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**UKRAINE AND A NEW EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE:
A REVISIT OF THE REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY 3**
Dmytro Byliev

**AMERICAN DECOUPLING FROM EUROPE: THE NEW APPROACHES
TO WASHINGTON'S (QUASI) LEADERSHIP 11**
Oleksandr Kraiev

**THE UKRAINE EFFECT: SECURITY GUARANTEES AND THE RISE
OF MINILATERALISM IN EUROPE'S NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE 18**
Elnur Ismayil

**"THE DONROE DOCTRINE": TRANSFORMATION OF THE US SECURITY POLICY
TOWARDS LATIN AMERICA DURING DONALD TRUMP'S SECOND TERM..... 31**
Ivan Fechko

STRATEGIC STABILITY IN AN ERA OF MULTIPOLAR NUCLEAR COMPETITION..... 43
Alina Hrytsenko

**BELARUS'S SUCCESSION PROBLEM AS THE MISSING LINK IN EUROPE'S
POST-WAR SECURITY ARCHITECTURE 56**
Pavlo Rad

BELARUS'S SUCCESSION PROBLEM AS THE MISSING LINK IN EUROPE'S POST-WAR SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Pavlo Rad

Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism"

This article examines Belarus's place in Europe's post-war security architecture, tracing Minsk's geopolitical manoeuvring since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Although Lukashenka has been able to keep the regime afloat, it remains vulnerable, because the system is built around one person and lacks a functioning succession mechanism, which Russia could exploit in the coming transition period. Since regional stability is not possible without a stable and predictable Belarus, the article offers recommendations for how Ukraine and the EU can minimise this risk.

Introduction

When experts and policymakers discuss what European security should look like once the current war ends, the conversation tends to centre on ending the fighting in Ukraine, reinforcing NATO's eastern flank, and building security guarantees strong enough to deter another Russian attack. Belarus rarely gets the same attention, even though lasting stability in the region is hard to imagine without taking the Belarusian factor into account.

Since the 2020 political crisis and Belarus's role in Russia's full-scale invasion, the country has come to be seen largely as a Russian satellite, while the EU's response has mostly boiled down to sanctions and diplomatic isolation. Yet despite its dependence on Moscow, Belarus has held on to certain elements of political and institutional autonomy, and these are worth preserving and, where possible, expanding.

This question matters even more, given the future power transition in Belarus once Aliaksandr Lukashenka leaves office. The current system of governance has never operated without him, so it is genuinely difficult to predict how it would function in his absence. Such a period would leave Belarusian statehood more vulnerable, and could give Moscow room to tighten its military, political, and economic grip on the country. If that happens, Belarus risks becoming a permanent Russian military outpost, and a lasting source of pressure on the Baltic states, Poland, and Ukraine.

Comfortable Status Quo

It sounds paradoxical, but the continuation of the active phase of the Russo-Ukrainian war actually suits the Minsk regime better than a lasting peace. Thanks to Belarus's role in supporting Russia's war effort, Minsk is currently enjoying its best period of relations with Moscow in three decades. Russia presently views Belarus as a key stronghold

on the frontline of its confrontation with the West, and the Lukashenka regime uses that status as leverage to secure subsidies and economic support from the Kremlin.²⁸

That balance is fragile, though, and a decisive success by either side could undermine it. A Russian victory might embolden Moscow to pursue new military or political conquests in the region, this time at Belarus's expense. Ukraine's victory, on the other hand, could trigger internal destabilisation inside Russia and cast doubt on its ability to keep supporting the Lukashenka regime.



A rapid normalisation phase between Moscow and the West would create its own problems for Lukashenka

A rapid normalisation phase between Moscow and the West would create its own problems for Lukashenka. Belarus would stop being such a valuable stronghold, which would lower Minsk's geopolitical importance for the Kremlin. On top of that, if Western companies and capital start returning to Russia as relations thaw, the Belarusian economy would lose a meaningful share of the Russian market it currently benefits from. To keep access to Russian resources in both the near and distant future, the Lukashenka regime would have to keep finding new arguments for why Moscow still needs Belarus.

In such a situation, a Russia-Ukraine truce, essentially a frozen conflict along the current front line, looks like the best possible outcome for Lukashenka. Russia would maintain a large army near the border, and remain prepared for potential

future operations, so it would not abandon its militaristic course entirely. At the same time, a truce could widen the partial lifting of Western sanctions already underway, many of which were imposed together with those on Russia, helping the Belarusian economy offset at least some of the risks tied to Western companies returning to the Russian market.

Geopolitical Risk Management

At the same time, Minsk has taken a clear course towards minimising potential risks. The Lukashenka regime has stepped up its efforts to engage in dialogue with Western countries, particularly with the United States. It first tried to carve out a role for itself in the negotiations between the United States and Russia, and later to diversify its economic ties in the throes of a trade deficit and mounting difficulties in expanding its presence in the Russian market. Since July 2024, Lukashenka has initiated multiple rounds of amnesty, resulting in the release of dozens of political prisoners.



In such a situation, a Russia-Ukraine truce, essentially a frozen conflict along the current front line, looks like the best possible outcome for Lukashenka

Over the following months, the process gained real momentum. On 21 June 2025, a visit to Minsk by Keith Kellogg, the US president's special envoy for Ukraine, was followed by the release of fourteen political prisoners, among them Sergei Tikhonovsky, who had spent five years in detention as one of Lukashenka's most prominent domestic opponents. The most significant

²⁸ Artyom Shraibman, Lukashenko Seeks to Piggyback on U.S.-Russia Rapprochement, *Carnegie Politika*, 17.04.2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/04/belarus-usa-russia-opportunity>

breakthrough came six months later.²⁹ On 13 December 2025, Lukashenka pardoned 123 people, describing the move as part of an understanding reached with President Trump.³⁰ Among those freed were Viktor Babaryka and Maria Kalesnikava, both prominent figures in the 2020 protest movement, along with Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski. The announcement came the same day Washington removed the state airline Belavia from the US sanctions list, and it was explicitly tied to the lifting of restrictions on Belaruskali, the country's dominant potash producer.

 ***Minsk has been deepening ties with Asian countries, especially in Central Asia, a shift visible in more intensive diplomatic outreach, and the appointment of ambassadors with an economic background to key trading partners such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan***

The releases continued in 2026 as well. Following a visit by US special envoy John Coale in March 2026, Minsk carried out its largest single round of pardons to date, freeing 250 people, most of whom remained in Belarus, while at least fifteen others were

deported to Lithuania.³¹ Each new wave has followed roughly the same pattern: a visit by an American official, a batch of releases timed to coincide with it, and a further easing of US sanctions, this time extending into the banking sector. Taken together, these steps show a regime willing to trade a steady stream of political prisoners for tangible economic relief, without changing its underlying character at home.

Minsk's risk management is not limited to its dealings with the West; the government is pursuing several other tracks simultaneously. One priority for the coming months is widening the geographic reach of Belarusian exports. Senior officials, including Lukashenka himself, have openly acknowledged the country's economic difficulties, in particular a decline in export volumes.³² To offset this, Minsk has been deepening ties with Asian countries, especially in Central Asia, a shift visible in more intensive diplomatic outreach, and the appointment of ambassadors with an economic background to key trading partners such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.³³

China will remain Belarus's main foothold in Asia and its second most-important partner after Russia. Chinese activity there has been rising since the summer of 2024, marked by a surge in diplomatic engagements³⁴

29 Белорусский оппозиционер Сергей Тихановский вышел на свободу (Belarusian opposition figure Sergei Tikhanovsky released), Meduza, 21.06.2025, <https://meduza.io/feature/2025/06/21/beloruskiy-oppozitsioner-sergey-tihanovskiy-vyshel-na-svobodu-v-vilnyuse-ego-vstretila-zhena-i-lider-oppozitsii-svetlana-tihanovskaya>

30 Лукашенко помиловал более 120 осужденных (Lukashenka pardons more than 120 convicts), Meduza, 13.12.2025, <https://meduza.io/feature/2025/12/13/lukashenko-pomiloval-bolee-120-osuzhdennykh-na-svobodu-vyshli-mariya-kolesnikova-viktor-babariko-i-laureat-nobelevskoy-premii-mira-ales-belyatskiy>

31 В Беларуси освободили 250 политзаключённых. Список (Belarus releases 250 political prisoners. List), Human Rights Center Viasna, 19.03.2026, <https://spring96.org/ru/news/119847>

32 Основной причиной падения экспорта Беларуси стало снижение поставок в страны вне СНГ — ЕАБР (Falling non-CIS deliveries are the main reason for Belarus's export decline, EDB says), Pozirk, 10.03.2026, <https://pozirk.online/ru/news/129248/>

33 Post on the appointment of new Belarusian ambassadors, Pul Pervogo Telegram channel, 2025, https://t.me/pul_1/15204

34 Belarus Officially Becomes BRICS Partner, Belarus.by, 2025, https://www.belarus.by/en/press-center/news/belarus-officially-becomes-brics-partner_i_180332.html

and the first-ever joint military exercises on Belarusian soil.³⁵ Minsk moved fast on this front. Belarus obtained full Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) membership and BRICS partner status, followed in 2025 by further meetings between Lukashenka and Xi Jinping, participation in the SCO summit, defence ministry engagement, and Minsk courting individual Chinese provinces the same way it has long courted Russian regions. For Belarus, China is not just a trading partner but a hedge, a way to broaden its room for foreign policy manoeuvre, and a card to play as it tries to rebuild ties with the West.

China, for its part, has shown some interest in helping de-escalate the situation in the region, illustrated by Wang Yi's visit to Warsaw and Li Xi's visit to Minsk during Poland's border closure in autumn 2025, since a more predictable Belarus serves Beijing's own economic interests in Europe. Another vivid example followed in June 2026. After a closed-door meeting with Vladimir Putin at Valdai, Lukashenka travelled to Beijing for talks with Xi Jinping, who described the relationship between the two countries as being at a historic peak, and reaffirmed China's support for Belarus's independence and territorial integrity.³⁶ The reassurance came at a pointed moment: relations between Belarus and Ukraine were sliding towards confrontation, with Kyiv accusing Minsk of hosting equipment used to guide Russian drone strikes and threatening to destroy it by force, amid growing fears in Kyiv that Russia was trying to drag Belarus directly into the war.³⁷



China, for its part, has shown some interest in helping de-escalate the situation in the region, illustrated by Wang Yi's visit to Warsaw and Li Xi's visit to Minsk

Nevertheless, Minsk has to keep proving its strategic value to Russia if it wants to avoid serious setbacks, once the active phase of the war ends. Russia remains crucial to Belarusian foreign and economic policy, and the main guarantor of the regime's survival. To keep access to Russian resources open, the Lukashenka regime will likely look for new ways to show the Kremlin it is still useful. That could mean giving Belarusian defence firms a bigger role in supporting Russian rearmament, or pitching elements of Belarus's own economic model, such as its state planning system, as something Moscow could borrow from, all in the hope of winning preferential treatment in return.

Power Transit Dilemma

This whole balancing act in foreign policy does more than just keep the current regime afloat. It is also laying the groundwork for what comes after it. The Belarusian political system is already changing gradually, as shown by the fact that Lukashenka has pushed through a series of legal measures meant to protect the system he built, and keep it running once he is gone.

35 China, Belarus Hold First Joint Military Exercises near Poland's Border, CNN, 08.07.2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/07/08/europe/china-belarus-military-exercises-poland-intl/index.html>

36 Встреча Лукашенко и Си Цзиньпина в Пекине 29 июня: подробности, темы обсуждений (Lukashenka-Xi Jinping meeting in Beijing on 29 June: details and discussion topics), Lenta.ru, 29.06.2026, <https://lenta.ru/news/2026/06/29/lukashenko-posle-zakrytyh-peregovorov-s-putiny-m-otpravilsya-k-si-tszipinpinu-o-chem-oni-govorili-bolshe-treh-chasov/>

37 Зачем Украина идет на конфликт с Беларусью? (Why is Ukraine heading toward conflict with Belarus?), Meduza, 24.06.2026, <https://meduza.io/feature/2026/06/24/zachem-ukraina-idet-na-konflikt-s-belarusyu-i-ne-sblizit-li-eto-esche-bolshe-minsk-s-moskvoy>

He is doing this through several mechanisms at once. First, he wants to keep so-called “destructive forces” (in reality, the Belarusian opposition abroad) out of the country’s top political offices and away from the presidency altogether. In January 2024, he signed off on sweeping changes to the presidential law that raised the minimum age for candidates to 40 and doubled the residency requirement to twenty years.³⁸ For the first time, the law also prohibits anyone holding foreign citizenship, permanent residency abroad, or special privileges tied to foreign documents from running for president.

Lukashenka still has an institutional tool he could use to manage a succession process if he needs to: the All-Belarusian People’s Assembly

Second, he has secured legal protections for himself and his family. The updated law expands the amount of state benefits available to the former president and his relatives and, for the first time, introduces something close to domestic diplomatic immunity: protection from prosecution for actions taken in office, and legal inviolability for personal property, vehicles, real estate, and correspondence. It also guarantees lifelong medical care, a state pension, and tax exemptions for the former president and his family.

Third, Lukashenka still has an institutional tool he could use to manage a succession process if he needs to: the All-Belarusian

People’s Assembly. It was originally designed as a vehicle for controlled succession, modelled on the approach Nursultan Nazarbayev had taken in Kazakhstan, with Lukashenka intended to retain overarching influence as its head while a new president took on a more symbolic role.³⁹

Lukashenka cannot count on a rapid thaw with the West, given Belarus’s support for Russia’s war against Ukraine

That plan was postponed after the mass protests of 2020, when Lukashenka reasserted control with Kremlin backing and drew closer to Moscow. Since then, the Assembly has been mostly a ceremonial body with little genuine political power. It is still built into the regime’s institutional architecture, though, and could be revived. If the need arises, Lukashenka can expand its authority and use it both as a channel for influence over domestic politics and as an extra layer of personal security.

Key Challenges to be Faced

Despite all this preparation, it remains unclear whether all this will lead to a named successor or a voluntary handover of power. Lukashenka is unlikely to move forward with any transition unless he is confident it will not be derailed by regional instability or by shifts in Belarus’s relations with Russia and the West, especially during such a delicate period for the regime. Without firm guarantees about how the war ends and

38 В Беларуси подписан закон о пожизненных гарантиях президенту (Belarus signs law on lifetime guarantees for the president), *Radio Svoboda*, 04.01.2024, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/v-belarusi-podpisan-zakon-o-pozhiznennyh-garantiyah-prezidentu/32759843.html>

39 Війна жузів і закінчення транзиту влади в Казахстані (The War of Clans and the End of the Power Transit in Kazakhstan), *ThePage.ua*, 06.01.2022, <https://thepage.ua/experts/vojna-zhuzov-i-okonchanie-tranzita-vlasti-v-kazahstane>

whether Belarusian sovereignty survives it, a voluntary handover remains unlikely. The memory of the 2020 protests still looms over Lukashenka, and narrows the paths available for any peaceful transition.

Beyond this domestic uncertainty over succession, external recognition also matters. Lukashenka cannot count on a rapid thaw with the West, given Belarus's support for Russia's war against Ukraine. The United States has recently shown far more interest in engaging with the Belarusian authorities than its European counterparts. Still, both Poland and Lithuania have tried, each in its own way, to test how much autonomy Belarus retains from Moscow and to reach de-escalation through a process of first escalation then easing off.



For all of Minsk's manoeuvring, the truth is that Lukashenka has boxed himself into a position where almost any outcome risks opening a Pandora's box over the fate of his regime and that of Belarus itself

Warsaw went first. Hoping to extract concessions from the Belarusian authorities and reassert its regional influence, Poland shut down all its land crossings with Belarus entirely. That move affected China's interests, as its overland cargo transit to Europe through Poland and Belarus was incurring losses as a result. Two months later, Poland reopened two checkpoints that had been closed for almost four years. Minsk responded by scaling back

migration pressure and opening the talks that eventually paid off. At the end of April 2026, Andrzej Poczobut, the Polish minority activist who had spent five years in a Belarusian prison, was freed as part of a wider exchange of detainees between Minsk and Warsaw, and Belarus has since almost completely stopped the flow of migrants across the border.⁴⁰

Lithuania followed a similar path but moved more slowly, first raising the stakes by temporarily shutting all its border crossings with Belarus, then lifting the restrictions. In April 2026, Vilnius finally laid out its own conditions for dialogue, an end to migrant pressure, a halt to use of smuggling balloons crossing into Lithuanian airspace, and the return of the remaining Belarusian-held prisoners, a shift that also followed recommendations from the US State Department that Lithuania consider allowing the resumption of the transit of Belarusian potash fertiliser through their territory.⁴¹

Pandora's Box

For all of Minsk's manoeuvring, the truth is that Lukashenka has boxed himself into a position where almost any outcome risks opening a Pandora's box over the fate of his regime and that of Belarus itself. The core of the domestic problem is that Lukashenka has built a centralised, personalist regime, designed to preserve the status quo rather than to develop the country. The system rests on the loyalty of officials and on his own dominant role as its leader. Because its functioning depends so heavily on him personally, Lukashenka has put himself in

40 Анджей Почобут на свободе после обмена между Беларусью и Польшей (Andrzej Poczobut freed after prisoner exchange between Belarus and Poland), Radio Svoboda, 28.04.2026, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/andzhey-pochobut-na-svobode-posle-obmena-mezhdu-belarusyju-i-polshey/33744322.html>

41 Президент Литвы дал Минску месяц на выполнение условий по возобновлению диалога (Lithuania's president gives Minsk a month to meet conditions for resuming dialogue), EADaily, 02.04.2026, <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2026/04/02/prezident-litvy-dal-minsku-mesyac-na-vypolnenie-usloviy-po-vozobnovleniyu-dialoga>

a position where he can hardly afford to leave office at all. Given the volatile foreign policy environment, the fear of internal destabilisation, and his own desire to keep a grip on the country's main political processes, he is likely to keep deferring the question of succession. Doing so only postpones one of the worst scenarios: should serious health problems or death remove him from power, a system built entirely on personal subordination would be left paralysed, and Russia would be the first to exploit it.



With a negotiating track already forming between Washington and Minsk, the EU risks ending up as a bystander rather than an active player in this process

If Russia manages to get its way in Belarus, it will create permanent threats to Ukraine and some other European countries.

Over the last few years, Moscow and Minsk have been synchronising legislation, integrating their defence industries, and forging elements of military command into shared structures, steps that only make sense if the two states expect to function as one military space. None of this requires Russia to annex Belarus outright: financial and institutional control over Minsk already secures what annexation would, continued access to Belarusian territory for provocations, hybrid operations, intimidation, and, should the moment call for it, larger operations launched from Belarusian soil. That alone gives Moscow a permanent lever of pressure, not only on Ukraine's northern border but on NATO's eastern flank as a whole, given that Vilnius sits barely fifty kilometres from Belarusian territory, and that the Baltic states remain

connected to the rest of Europe only through the narrow Suwałki Corridor.

What Could Be Done

Despite the complexity of the situation, Belarus's autonomy and sovereignty are not yet fully lost, as the practice of geopolitical risk-management has shown. Because regional stability cannot be secured without a predictable situation in Belarus, Ukraine and the EU need to prepare for what comes after Lukashenka rather than wait for it.

The first priority is to preserve channels of communication with officialdom in Minsk. Keeping some exchange of signals going with the Lukashenka regime would let the EU and Ukraine track developments inside Belarus, and gauge the mood within the elite, while also giving Brussels and Kyiv a way to warn Minsk about the destabilising consequences of any further escalation with Ukraine or other European countries. It would also remind Lukashenka and those around him that there is an alternative path towards dialogue and de-escalation.

It is also important to see sanctions as a tool rather than as a goal in themselves. With a negotiating track already forming between Washington and Minsk, the EU risks ending up as a bystander rather than an active player in this process, which could potentially translate into greater US pressure on Belarus's European neighbours to allow Belarusian transit of potash fertiliser to resume. What is needed instead is a more flexible mechanism, one that makes adjustments to sanctions based on how genuinely the current regime engages in constructive dialogue with the EU, while making sure European interests are not sidelined. At the same time, lifting sanctions on military-industrial enterprises tied to Russia's war effort, however, should remain off the table entirely.

Beyond managing the present, Ukraine and the EU also need to prepare for changes in Belarus's ruling elite, since the Belarusian dictator will not be able to rule forever. The transition triggered by his eventual departure, and the reshaping of the personalised system he built, could turn out to be unpredictable and dangerous, particularly given the chance that Moscow will try to exploit the uncertainty for its own benefit. The EU needs to prepare for these scenarios in advance, while also looking for ways to influence some sections of the Belarusian political elite.

None of this will matter much, though, without also creating preconditions for democratic transformation in Belarus. Doing this means identifying and developing further mechanisms to strengthen Belarusian democratic forces, and to widen their reach within Belarusian society. Long-term training programmes for activists, along with sharing lessons learned from successful reform efforts elsewhere, would be a good place to start. At the same time, the EU and Ukraine should work together to build up for them a more positive image within Belarusian society, with particular attention to the neutral and apolitical majority of the population.

Conclusions

Belarus has ended up in a position where its domestic political stability depends entirely on one man. Lukashenka built a centralised, personalised system, and the country's future now rests on how and when that system will evolve. A change of power in Belarus has to happen sooner

or later, but the unstable foreign policy environment and the risks that come with it keep pushing Lukashenka to put off any voluntary, controlled transition, even though he has already partly prepared the country for the scenario, and has tried to reduce the risks attached to it by diversifying Belarus's foreign policy ties.

The longer this goes on, the greater the risk that the change of power ends up being forced by Lukashenka's death or through a serious health crisis, rather than by his own choice, and Russia would move quickly to exploit any moment of vulnerability. Should Moscow succeed in doing so, it would gain a stronger hand for turning Belarusian territory into a permanent source of threat against Ukraine's northern border and against the Baltic states and Poland. Even an end to the Russia-Ukraine war, in that scenario, would not bring lasting stability or security to the region, since the underlying conditions on the ground would still point towards renewed pressure rather than away from it.

Pavlo Rad is an analyst on the Russian and Belarusian Studies Programme at the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism". His research interests include the activities of the Belarusian democratic forces, the domestic and foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus, and its relations with Russia, Ukraine, and the European Union. He holds an LLM in International Law from the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv and is an alumnus of several programmes at Albert-Ludwigs-University of Freiburg (Germany), the Mercatus Centre at George Mason University (US), and Central European University (Hungary).



Issue 2 (40), 2026

ISSN 2518-7481