



**MICHAŁ SŁOWIKOWSKI**

Uniwersytet Łódzki, Wydział Studiów Międzynarodowych i Politologicznych  
ORCID: 0000-0001-5202-5080  
michal.slowikowski@wsmip.uni.lodz.pl

**MICHAŁ KLONOWSKI**

Uniwersytet Łódzki, Wydział Studiów Międzynarodowych i Politologicznych  
ORCID: 0000-0003-0226-6593  
michal.klonowski@uni.lodz.pl

## Russia – full spectrum revisionist?

What the Kremlin's exploitation of the Belarusian political crisis teaches us about the nature of Russia's confrontation with the West

## Rosja – całkowity rewizjonista?

Czego uczy nas wykorzystywanie przez Kreml białoruskiego kryzysu politycznego o naturze konfrontacji Rosji z Zachodem

**Keywords:**

Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, revisionism, information warfare, Alyaksandr Lukashenka

**Słowa kluczowe:**

Białoruś, Rosja, Ukraina, rewizjonizm, wojna informacyjna, Alaksandr Łukaszenka

## **Russia – full spectrum revisionist? What the Kremlin's exploitation of the Belarusian political crisis teaches us about the nature of Russia's confrontation with the West**

The political crisis in Belarus, provoked by public dissatisfaction with the fraudulent presidential election in August 2020, has entailed a number of consequences for the international status of Belarus. On the one hand, there was a rapprochement with Russia and, on the other, Belarus found itself in a state of cold war with the West. The reasons for this state of affairs should be seen primarily in the attitude of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who perceived the social protests as a serious threat to his illegitimate rule and, at the same time, inspired by the West. The threat of losing power caused him to turn to Russia for help, which was given to him. Russia was guided primarily in this case by its own fears, which concerned: the threat of losing control over a geopolitically important region, the shrinking of the area considered to be a zone of exclusive interests in favour of the West, the prospects of the successful democratisation of Belarus and the transmission of the virus of democracy to the Russian political system. Lukashenka, still unsure of his position and Russia's support, has taken steps to strengthen the Kremlin's loyalty. To this end, he continued to take anti-Western actions, aware that his closest ally in the Kremlin was the siloviks group, which was the most influential group of the Kremlin's elite and at the same time responsible for the Russian confrontation with the West. From Russia's point of view, the Belarus-Russia conflict has become a platform for a whole spectrum of revisionist activities: offensive, defensive and isolationist. At the same time, Belarus and its conflict with the West have become part of information warfare against the West, as a part of which the Kremlin was generating tension in the capitals of European countries and the United States. Russia was interested in keeping this going as long as possible, which was not necessarily in line with Lukashenka's own expectations. Whether he liked it or not, he has become a hostage to the fraternal grip of help from Russia. Even if Lukashenka was overwhelmed with help from Russia, whose hug was suffocating for Belarus' autonomy, the benefits from playing with Russia in one team were greater than the costs of rejecting the Kremlin's friendship... at least until 24 February 2022.

## **Rosja – całkowity rewizjonista? Czego uczy nas wykorzystywanie przez Kreml białoruskiego kryzysu politycznego o naturze konfrontacji Rosji z Zachodem**

Kryzys polityczny w Białorusi, wywołany niezadowoleniem społecznym ze sfalszowanych wyborów prezydenckich w sierpniu 2020 r., pociągnął za sobą szereg konsekwencji związanych z międzynarodowym statusem państwa. Z jednej strony nastąpiło zbliżenie z Rosją, a z drugiej Białoruś znalazła się w stanie zimnej wojny z Zachodem. Przyczyn takiego stanu rzeczy należy upatrywać przede wszystkim w postawie Alaksandra Łukaszenki, który protesty społeczne postrzegał jako inspirowane przez Zachód poważne zagrożenie dla swoich nielegalnych rządów. Groźba utraty władzy skłoniła go, by zwrócić się o pomoc do Rosji. Otrzymał ją, a Moskwa kierowała się w tym przypadku przede wszystkim własnymi obawami, które dotyczyły: groźby utraty kontroli nad ważnym geopolitycznie regionem, kurczenia się obszaru uznawanego za strefę wyłącznych interesów na korzyść Zachodu, perspektywy pomyślnego demokratyzacji Białorusi i przeniesienia wirusa demokracji do rosyjskiego systemu politycznego. Wciąż niepewny swojej pozycji i poparcia Rosji Łukaszenka podjął kroki mające wzmocnić lojalność Kremla. W tym celu kontynuował działania antyzachodnie, mając świadomość, że jego najbliższym sojusznikiem na Kremlu jest ugrupowanie siłowików, które było najbardziej wpływową grupą tamtejszej elity i jednocześnie odpowiadało za rosyjską konfrontację z Zachodem. Z punktu widzenia Moskwy konflikt białorusko-rosyjski stał się platformą dla pełnego spektrum działań rewizjonistycznych: ofensywnych, defensywnych oraz izolacjonistycznych. Jednocześnie Białoruś i jej konflikt z Zachodem stały się częścią wojny informacyjnej przeciwko Zachodowi, w ramach której Kreml generował napięcia w stolicach państw europejskich i Stanach Zjednoczonych. Rosja była zainteresowana utrzymaniem tego stanu jak najdłużej, co niekoniecznie było zgodne z oczekiwaniami samego Łukaszenki. Czy mu się to podobało, czy nie, stał się zakładnikiem braterskiego uścisku Rosji. Nawet jeśli był przytłoczony pomocą Moskwy, której uścisk dławił autonomię Białorusi, to korzyści płynące z gry w jednej drużynie z Kremlem były większe niż koszty odrzucenia jego przyjaźni... przynajmniej do 24 lutego 2022 r.

In the spring of 2021, the anti-regime social protests in Belarus that had begun in August 2020 after the fraudulent presidential elections were slowly dying. The revolution lost its momentum, not bringing the expected results, that is, a repetition of the elections and, as the protesters expected, Alyaksandr Lukashenka relinquishing the presidential seat he has occupied for last 26 years.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this are seen both in the unique characteristics of the Belarusian political system and in the influence of external forces on political events in Belarus.

In the domestic political dimension, the collapse of the Belarusian pro-democratic protests is attributed to the durability of state structures, the grossness of the Belarusian repressive apparatus, the lack of concessions from the regime and any attempts at dialogue with the opposition. This caused a sense of fatigue and growing apathy in Belarusian society, which was clearly divided over the feasibility of the protests and the belief in their success.<sup>2</sup>

If we take into account external circumstances, the lack of significant involvement of Western countries and their institutions in democratic changes in Belarus as well as the Kremlin's unequivocal support for Lukashenka's regime – assuming that it was of paramount importance – should be emphasised. Russia's clear and unflinching support has affected

- 1 The term *revolution* is therefore used by the author in a narrow, political science approach and pertains to certain mode of political transition when spontaneous popular mobilization brings changes to the existing regime. T. L. Karl, Ph. Schmitter, *Models of transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe*, "International Social Science Journal" 1991, vol. 43, No. 128, p. 275; C. Tilly, *From mobilization to revolution*, Random House, New York 1978, p. 189.
- 2 А. Сахнин, *В Белоруссии ошиблись все*, "Ведомости" [online], 9 II 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2021/02/08/857158-belorussii-oshiblis>>; В. Пастухов, *Революция отходит с Белорусского вокзала*, "Новая газета", 18 IX 2020; V. Socor, *A Belarusian revolution? What kind? (part one)*, "Eurasia Daily Monitor" 2020, vol. 17, issue 154: <<https://jamestown.org/program/a-belarusian-revolution-what-kind-part-one/>> [accessed: 4 III 2022]; R. Astapenia, *Why the Belarusian revolution has stalled*, "Chatham House" [online], 9 II 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/02/why-belarusian-revolution-has-stalled>>; A. Moshes, R. Nizhnikau, *The Belarusian revolution: Sources, interim outcomes, and lessons to be learned*, "Demokratizatsiya: The journal of post-Soviet democratization" 2021, vol. 29, No. 2, p. 174–177; S. A. Mudrov, *Doomed to fail? Why success was almost not an option in the 2020 protests in Belarus*, "Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe" 2021, vol. 29, issue 1, p. 8.

the cohesion of the regime, and, in particular, the loyalty of the power structures' members to Lukashenka, which was said to be the foundation of the regime's stability and thus its continuity.<sup>3</sup>

In the face of the decline in the dynamics of the protests, the Lukashenka regime has not reduced the level of repression. On the contrary, the more the protests weakened, the more active and brutal the regime's actions were. His actions began to take on an increasingly disturbing character: he tracked down plots against his life and those of his family members, and detected coup attempts.<sup>4</sup> Lukashenka combined the opposition's activity with inspiration from outside. Fighting the protests, he burned all bridges behind him about cooperation with the West – the cup of bitterness was poured by the abduction of the Ryanair plane in order to imprison Raman Pratashevich, who managed the Nexta Telegram channel, mobilising and organising opposition activities against Lukashenka in the aftermath of the fraudulent elections, as well as triggering the migration crisis on the border with Lithuania and Poland.

The analysis of Russia's actions towards the Belarusian political crisis was accompanied by many questions concerning their intentions, dynamics, the rationale of the chosen measures, the expected profits and their complex consequences. Accordingly, the purpose of the article is to answer some of the following questions:

- Why did Russia engage in an information campaign supporting Lukashenka beyond the previously accepted practice?
- What were the main elements of the narrative of influential representatives of the Russian strategic elite regarding the shocking international events that were the result of the anti-Western policy of the Belarusian regime?

3 A. Moshes, R. Nizhnikau, *The Belarusian...*, p. 177–180; Ф. Лукьянов, *Что надо сделать Москве, чтобы привязанность к ней Белоруссии не зависела от Лукашенко*, "Профиль" [online], 10 VIII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://profile.ru/abroad/что-надо-sdelat-moskve-chtoby-privyazannost-k-nej-belorussii-ne-zavisela-ot-lukashenko-907191/>>.

4 *Лукашенко рассказал о готовившемся покушении на него и его сыновей*, "Известия" [online], 17 IV 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://iz.ru/1153046/2021-04-17/lukashenko-rasskazal-o-zaderzhanii-planirovavshei-pokushenie-na-ego-detei-gruppy?fbclid=IwAR2giriM1xPou0I9\\_vJnCrzNiupbJfb-Du3ccbz7\\_MV6PWSG\\_bnivlab7\\_4k](https://iz.ru/1153046/2021-04-17/lukashenko-rasskazal-o-zaderzhanii-planirovavshei-pokushenie-na-ego-detei-gruppy?fbclid=IwAR2giriM1xPou0I9_vJnCrzNiupbJfb-Du3ccbz7_MV6PWSG_bnivlab7_4k)>.

- What benefits did the Kremlin derive from its involvement on Minsk's side in the Belarus-West conflict?
- Was there any significant connection between Russian narratives concerning the Belarus political crisis on the one hand and the Russia-West confrontation on the other?
- Why and how Belarus was engaged (exploited) in Russia's recent diplomatic showdown with the United States?

The Kremlin's exploitation of the political crisis in Belarus and the international consequences has been complex and dynamic. An in-depth analysis of its various aspects provides additional knowledge about: 1. the prevailing mood among the Russian strategic elite towards the West; 2. the well-established ideas about the desired shape of the system of international relations and Russia's place in them; 3. the tools used by Kremlin diplomacy while pursuing its goals concerning international relations.

The article refers to the existing literature concerning the Russian model of strategic culture, contentious views about what type of power Russia currently is, and widespread allegations regarding its revisionism.

The structure of the article corresponds with the formulated research questions and covers the following areas: Russia's attitude towards the West, the nature of its strategic culture, and the perception of its status as a revisionist power; the geopolitical significance of Belarus in the Kremlin's mental map of the global order; Russian narratives concerning the political crisis in Belarus and the international implications; the Kremlin's exploitation of prolonging the Minsk-West showdown amidst its recent conflict with the West and the efforts to obtain security guarantees from the United States.

### **The Kremlin's perception of the West, the global order and Russia's role in it**

In order to understand the causes, forms, dynamics and consequences of the involvement of the Kremlin's influential representatives (members of the so-called Russian strategic elite) in the defensive policy of Belarus against the West's criticism and sanctions measures enacted in the aftermath of the fraudulent elections and provocative actions begun by Lukashenka during 2021, the following circumstances should be taken into account.

At the level of both the strategic elite and society in Russia, anti-Western sentiments resonate very strongly. For the Kremlin elite, confrontation with the West is a key (if not the most important) element of the narrative regarding Russia's international identity, as well as an important factor in the claim to the legitimacy of Vladimir Putin's political regime. From the point of view of the legitimacy claims of the modern Russian political regime, aggression on the part of the West is used to justify the rightness of decisions taken in the sphere of domestic politics, contrary to the opinions and will of the West, whose intentions are hostile – aimed at weakening and exploiting Russia. The Kremlin propagates the narrative by saying that the West tries to impose its norms and standards on Russia, neglecting its history and traditions, whereas Russia is following its own path, building a so-called sovereign democracy.<sup>5</sup>

Russian society, despite some fluctuations in sentiment towards the West, presents stability in this respect – suspicion, or even hostility, remains the dominant factor as far as the West is concerned. The politics of the sanctions imposed on Russia after the Crimea annexations only reinforced that sentiment.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the expectations of the head of state regarding the restoration of Russia's status in the world are clearly formulated, resulting from an attempt to overcome the dissonance between expectations, ideas about Russia's potential and its real place in the system of international relations.<sup>7</sup> Russian sociologists have consistently pointed out that the actions taken by the Kremlin to oppose Western policies are popular among Russians, even if they are in conflict with the norms of international law. But it does not matter at all, as the latter are regarded

5 Владислав Сурков *развел демократию на суверенную и управляемую*, "Коммерсантъ", 29 VI 2006.

6 В. Дорохов, Д. Волков, Глава "Левада-Центра": *Общее отношение россиян к санкциям – Запад против нас*, "Левада-Центр" [online], 16 VI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.levada.ru/2021/06/10/glava-levada-tsentra-obshhee-otno-shenie-rossiyan-k-sanktsiyam-zapad-protiv-nas/?fbclid=IwAR3v-CmBLK7LHcTThacu2evZfEPi-CbZpNTEHH6ias7IX58f685Ujvt86U>>.

7 А. Громова, *Путин рассказал, как Европа делила Россию на несколько стран в 90-е*, "Газета" [online], 12 XII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2021/12/12\\_a\\_14307259.shtml?updated](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2021/12/12_a_14307259.shtml?updated)>; А. Левинсон, *Россия без Белоруссии*, "Ведомости", 20 I 2020.

as a tool for restricting the rights and interests of Russia, as they are a product of the West itself.

The West also occupies a key place in Russian strategic culture, understood as the “shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives”.<sup>8</sup> The key elements of Russia’s strategic culture are:

seeing oneself as a great power and expecting to be treated as such [...], a historical and enduring sense of threat that is mitigated by authoritarian leadership and the army [...], a willingness to engage in armed conflicts outside the country, and the ease of using the armed forces as a violent tool of foreign policy.<sup>9</sup>

Against this background, the West appears in the mental map of Russia’s decision-making elites in two forms: 1. as a direct threat to Russian vital national interests and its sovereignty; 2. the source of the depreciation of Russia’s role in the system of international relations.

The hostility and arrogance of the West are supposed to be rooted in history and form the basis of the anti-Western sentiment prevailing in Russia. These, on the other hand, are particularly strongly present in the narratives of the strategic elite. In Russia it is difficult to talk about the presence of state ideology in the full sense of the word, rather, we are dealing with a polyphony in which internal and external threads sometimes merge. An example of this is the “ideological” activity of Nikolai Patrushev, who did not hesitate to address the issue of the importance of Russian culture and its values, spinning considerations maintained in the spirit of their superiority over Western ones. Patrushev propagates the vision that declares “the West has been waging an information war against Russia for centuries,

8 D. Howlett, *The future of strategic culture*, Defense Threat Reduction Agency Advanced Systems and Concepts Office, 31 X 2006, p. 3: <<https://irp.fas.org/agency/dod/dtra/stratcult-future.pdf>> [accessed: 4 III 2022].

9 E. Rumer, R. Sokolsky, *Etched in stone: Russian strategic culture and the future of transatlantic security*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington 2020, p. 2: <[https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Russian\\_Strategic\\_Culture\\_Rumer\\_Sokolsky.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Russian_Strategic_Culture_Rumer_Sokolsky.pdf)> [accessed: 4 III 2022]; I. Wiltenburg, *The importance of understanding Russian strategic culture*, “Atlantisch Perspektief” 2020, vol. 44, No. 1, p. 7.

slandering it, demonizing its heroes, because it suffers from Russophobia, combined with hypocrisy”.<sup>10</sup>

The historical Russophobia of the West is also accompanied by a reluctance to accept the fact that Russia is an indispensable element of the security architecture in Europe. Building a stable, secure and integrated Europe, as Sergei Lavrov noted in 2016, “without Russia and against it, it always ends in tragedies, the effects of which could only be overcome with the participation of our state [Russia]”.<sup>11</sup>

### Russia as a revisionist power

Anti-Western sentiments are an important part of the Kremlin's claims to legitimacy and Russia's strategic culture but are also considerations about the ideal type of world order – incoherent with the West's one. Theorists, analysts and practitioners of international relations who take up the problem of Russia's international activity, draw attention to its growing assertiveness and even aggressiveness – heralded by Putin's Munich speech in 2007 – and the tendency to conclude alliances with countries (China, Iran) that manifest hostility towards the:

US-led liberal world order that emerged after the end of the Cold War which can be defined as a liberal rule-based system that is characterized by three interrelated features: the spread of democracy, the globalisation of trade and finance, and the formation of a dense network of international organizations.<sup>12</sup>

- 10 М. Соколов, *Страна Путина, режим Патрушева*, “Левада-Центр” [online], 12 VII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.levada.ru/2021/07/13/strana-putina-rezhim-patrusheva/>>; “Верим делам, а не словам”. Николай Патрушев – о перспективах диалога с США, “Аргументы и факты”, 5 V 2021.
- 11 *Статья Министра иностранных дел России С. В. Лаврова “Историческая перспектива внешней политики России”, опубликованная в журнале «Россия в глобальной политике» 3 марта 2016 года*, “Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации” [online, accessed: 14 II 2022]: <[https://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391](https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391)>.
- 12 *A speech delivered at the MSC 2007 by the President Vladimir Putin*, [2007]: <[https://is.muni.cz/th/xlghl/DP\\_Fillinger\\_Speeches.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/th/xlghl/DP_Fillinger_Speeches.pdf)> [accessed: 4 III 2022]; G. J. Ikenberry, *The end of liberal international order?*, “International Affairs” 2018,



Russia is credited with the status of a revisionist state, “as she has challenged this order, or at least certain elements of it”.<sup>13</sup>

Washington is the fiercest proponent of alleged Russian revisionism, putting it into the same group of powers as China. For example, the United States’ 2018 National Defense Strategy identifies Russia and China as revisionist states,<sup>14</sup> as “Russia has violated the borders of nearby nations and pursues veto power over the economic, diplomatic, and security decisions of its neighbors”.<sup>15</sup>

But some scholars posit that Russia is more a neo-revisionist power than a revisionist one. The lack of resources and mesmerising ideas to alter the global order stands behind these assumptions. Russia is sometimes seen as a “spoiler»; unwilling to accept what is posed as universal values, yet unable to formulate an intellectually attractive alternative”.<sup>16</sup> Russia is voicing criticisms at US hegemony, not the global order and its institutional architecture in which the West dominates, as it bends the rules to its will and tries to subjugate other actors. In Russia, accusations concerning revisionism are rebuffed and fit the logic of the neo-revisionism perspective.<sup>17</sup>

Some students of international relations posit that Russia is a power that wants to stop the decline of its international position and simply get back what it lost in the aftermath of losing the confrontation with the West during the Cold War. Aggressive actions being taken by Russia towards

vol. 94, No. 1, p. 15; E. Götz, C.-R. Merlen, *Russia and the question of world order*, “European Politics and Society” 2019, vol. 20, No. 2, p. 135.

13 Ibidem.

14 *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America. Sharpening the American military’s competitive edge*, U.S. Department of Defense: <<https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>> [accessed: 4 III 2022].

15 M. Eckle, *Pentagon chief calls Russia, China “revisionist powers”*, “Radio Free Europe. Radio Liberty” [online], 19 I 2018 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.rferl.org/a/pentagon-mattis-calls-russia-china-revisionist-powers/28985632.html>>.

16 R. Sakwa, *Stasis and change: Russia and the emergence of an anti-hegemonic world order*, [in:] *Russia in the changing international system*, ed. E. P. Dal, E. Ersen, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland 2019, p. 21.

17 A. Sushentsov, *Russia – a global revisionist?*, “Valdai Discussion Club” [online], 12 VI 2019 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-a-global-revisionist/>>.

the former Soviet Union's republics should be seen through the prism of defensive, not offensive, lenses.<sup>18</sup>

Russia's aggressive actions towards many countries in the post-Soviet area allows the assumption that their main aim is to strengthen the Russian political regime. The destabilisation of the political situation in Georgia and Ukraine is pushing back the prospects of their membership in European and Euro-Atlantic structures, which would have a positive impact on the consolidation of democracy and their socio-economic development respectively. The Kremlin is sending a clear message to Russians saying that: 1. rapprochement with the West only opens the way to destabilisation and chaos (the success of pro-democratic changes in post-Soviet states could be contagious and at the same time fatal for Putin's regime stability); 2. the West deliberately supports colour revolutions and the rise of nationalist (fascist) movements, and then puts the former republics of the USSR on a collision course with Russia, which becomes a besieged fortress; 3. Russia's efforts to regain some influence in some regions of the former Soviet Union is an expression of historical justice.

Elias Götz and Camille-Renaud Merlen acknowledge the fact that there is considerable disagreement about the nature and extent of Moscow's challenge to the present international order and the underlying drivers of Russian revisionism, as presented earlier in the article. They argue that it was possible to distinguish between three major perspectives:

The first suggests that Russia is a revanchist power, humiliated and betrayed by the West at the beginning of 1990s, that seeks to overturn the very foundations of the liberal world order, suffering from neo-imperial syndrome, and trying to rebuild the empire in the former Soviet Union.

The second perspective holds that Russia is a defensive power that works for incremental changes within the existing order, perceiving itself as an equal partner with the West, defending its sovereignty and trying to reverse Western encroachment.

The third perspective contends that Russia is an aggressive isolationist, meaning that the Putin regime deliberately plays a spoiler role in international affairs to boost its domestic legitimacy. The Kremlin stimulates anti-West sentiments among Russians, gets a boost for its legitimacy claims,

18 S. N. Macfarlane, *The "R" in BRICs. Is Russia an emerging power?*, "International Affairs" 2006, vol. 82, No. 1, p. 154.

tries to stop the spread of the democratic virus in the post-Soviet area, and protects the stability of its regime from external pressure.<sup>19</sup>

### Belarus' role in Russian geopolitical considerations before August 2020

Until August 2020, despite the almost regular economic conflicts with Russia (concerning prices for energy carriers, tax settlements on the export of oil and petroleum products by Belarus, access of Russian producers to the Belarusian market, Belarus' circumvention of anti-Western sanctions introduced by Russia), the rhetorical exchange of blows between Lukashenka and representatives of the Russian political elite (with regard to Belarusian autonomy in the sphere of foreign policy, resulting in the lack of *de iure* recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the annexation of Crimea, the inability of Russia to push through plans to deploy a military base in Belarus, the use of an anti-Russian narrative in Lukashenka's legitimisation strategy), the lack of any progress in the course of integration between the two countries (resulting from the fundamental and unchanging difference between Minsk and Moscow since the 90s in relation to what the Union State of Belarus and Russia is supposed to be and Lukashenka's fear of losing sovereignty), and the personal enmity between Putin and Lukashenka, Belarus has remained Russia's only ally.

In the eyes of Russians, Belarusians are a brotherly nation, and Belarus under Lukashenka is a well-managed, socially just state, spared destructive predatory privatisation and oligarchic capitalism. The public perception of Belarus in Russia remains basically unchanged and positive, largely mythologised and based on modest knowledge about modern Belarus.<sup>20</sup>

The same could not be said about the narratives concerning Belarus present at the level of Russia's political elite, which is much more diversified.<sup>21</sup>

19 E. Götz, C.-R. Merlen, *Russia...*, p. 133.

20 А. Левинсон, *Пусть Александр Лукашенко правит*, "v Times" [online], 3 XI 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.vtimes.io/2020/11/03/pochemu-belorussiya-ne-pohozha-na-rossiyu-a1245>>; *Belarus, Russia and the union state*, "Russian Public Opinion Research Center Press Release" [online], 9 VII 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://wciom.com/index.php?id=61&uid=1794>>.

21 I. Klinke, *Geopolitical narratives on Belarus in contemporary Russia*, "Perspectives" 2008, vol. 16, No. 1, p. 109.

According to Ian Klinke, Russian elite geopolitical thought on Belarus became dominated by three narratives: 1. fraternalism, which concerns affirming the integration of equal subjects with origins in a shared ethical, socio-cultural, and historical background; 2. paternalism, which emphasises the shared benefits that come from a deeper integration for both countries and promotes a federative form of integration where Belarus would be subordinate to Russian interests and would have to accept its “legal legacy” and socio-economic development model; 3. parasitism, which calls for disengagement from the deepened ties with Belarus due to their harmfulness and conflicting interests from the perspective of Russia’s national interests.<sup>22</sup>

In Russian geopolitical thinking, Belarus is not only seen as a resource in Russian state development and an asset in the rivalry with the West, but also as an object of fear and uncertainty. Aliaksei Kazharski and Monika Kubová observe that:

Different aspects or modalities of ontological insecurity that have existed in post-Soviet Russia can be visualized as a triangle, which brings together insecurities about its position vis-a-vis the West, the liminal “near-abroad”, and the domestic political insecurities of the ruling class.<sup>23</sup>

The political crisis in Belarus has raised serious concerns in the Kremlin about the stability of Lukashenka’s political regime and the risk of a pro-Western turn in post-Lukashenka Belarus. Although the probability of such a scenario seemed incredibly low, as representatives of the Belarusian opposition were consequently assuring the Kremlin that Belarus-without-Lukashenka will be Russia’s friend and partner, the latter did not believe these assurances.<sup>24</sup>

22 Ibidem, p. 123.

23 A. Kazharski, M. Kubová, *Belarus as a liminal space for Russia’s ontological security before and after the 2020 protests*, “New Perspectives” 2021, vol. 29, No. 3, p. 10.

24 *Обращение Координационного совета к российской общественности и официальным лицам*, “Координационный совет” [online], 14 IX 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://rada.vision/obrashhenie-koordinacionnogo-soveta-k-rossijskoj-obshhe-stvennosti-i-oficialnym-licam>>; Светлана Тихановская – Тузы, “Эхо Москвы” [online], 26 X 2021 [accessed: 14 II 2022]: <<https://echo.msk.ru/programs/tuz/2925800-echo/>>.

A hypothetical turn towards the West would mean, in the long run, disastrous consequences from the point of view of Russia's national security, but also for its international identity and, finally, the stability of the political regime. Belarus is a forward outpost, a physical barrier to the Euro-Atlantic structures, the technical base of the Russian defence industry (a crucial source of military components like continuous tracks), but also the cultural proximity of Russians and Belarusians made the hypothetical success of democratic changes in Belarus dangerous (because it would be highly contagious) from the point of view of the stability of Russian authoritarianism.

The Kremlin's involvement on Lukashenka's side during the post-August 2020 crisis results to a decisive extent from the assessment of the gains and losses made from the point of view of its interests. Although it is accepted that Lukashenka's position more or less satisfied the Kremlin's elite, it must be noted that Russia's room for manoeuvre was limited in this respect. Neither before nor during the ongoing protests did divisions within the Belarusian ruling circle emerge, no significant case of elite defection was observed, and there was no alternative political figure to whom the Kremlin could give political support, without the risk that Belarus would make a geopolitical turn towards the West.<sup>25</sup>

### Russian narratives on the political crisis in Belarus and its aftermath

In the first days after the outbreak of social protests in Belarus, the Kremlin took a wait-and-see position, observing the development of the situation, which translated into quite cautious initial statements by representatives

25 С. Николюк, *Чтобы случились изменения, должен произойти не раскол, а сплочение элит*, "Свободные новости плюс" [online], 6 IV 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.sn-plus.com/2021/04/06/chtoby-sluchilis-izmeneniya-dolzhen-proizoyti-ne-raskol-a-splochenie-elit/>>; А. Федоров, *Готов ли Кремль взять на себя ответственность за всё, что произойдет в Беларуси?*, "Ex-Press" [online], 18 X 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://ex-press.by/rubrics/politika/2020/10/18/gotov-li-kreml-vzyat-na-sebya-otvetstvennost-za-vsyo-chto-proizojdet-v-belarusi/>>; А. Перцев, Т. Лысова, Ф. Рустамова, *Путин поддерживает Лукашенко? Кремль решил, что делать с Беларусью? Спойлер: кажется, никакого плана у Москвы нет*, "Meduza" [online], 19 IX 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://meduza.io/feature/2020/09/19/putin-podderzhivaet-lukashenko-kreml-reshil-chto-delat-s-belarusyu>>.

of the Russian strategic elite. The Kremlin's lack of instructions to the state media and members of the broadly understood party of power, the deputies of the Duma and the Federation Council, about which narrative to use when commenting on the events in Belarus, resulted in open talks about Lukashenka's abuses and electoral fraud. Some Russian politicians even called for the Kremlin to "writ[e] Lukashenka off".<sup>26</sup> Soon, however, the Kremlin changed its position and the uncontrolled narrative maintained in the spirit of "Belarus is not Ukraine" gave way to a controlled narrative of "in Belarus, just as in Ukraine".<sup>27</sup> For the Kremlin, Lukashenka won the election and fully sympathised with him, although "the elections were not perfect": Putin was quite laconic when commenting on the result of the Belarusian elections: "The elections took place. We immediately recognized their legitimacy. I congratulated Alyaksandr Ryhoravich Lukashenka on his victory. That's all".<sup>28</sup>

The Kremlin responded to Lukashenka's request for support, but limited itself in its actions. This was as symbolic as it was significant from the point of view of the stability of his regime, with the loss of social and international legitimacy. Putin's unequivocal decision to support Lukashenka has calmed the first signs of panic among members of the Belarusian ruling elite. Cases of desertion have ceased, "Russia's support within the system was read as a guarantee that the social protests would not break Lukashenka".<sup>29</sup>

26 Затулин выдал "взгляд Кремля" на протесты в Белоруссии, "Московский Комсомолец" [online], 13 VIII 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.mk.ru/politics/2020/08/13/zatulin-vydal-vzglyad-kremlya-na-protesty-v-belorussii.html>>.

27 Многие государственные СМИ в России не спешат поддерживать Александра Лукашенко. Получается, Кремль больше в него не верит?, "Meduza" [online], 19 VIII 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://meduza.io/feature/2020/08/19/mnogie-gosudarstvennye-smi-v-rossii-ne-spushat-podderzhivat-aleksandra-lukashenko-poluchaetsya-kreml-bolshe-v-nego-ne-verit>>.

28 Ibidem; Лавров: руководство Белоруссии признает, что выборы не были идеальными, "Газета" [online], 19 VIII 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2020/08/19/n\\_14819515.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2020/08/19/n_14819515.shtml)>; Путин признал легитимность президентских выборов в Белоруссии, "РИА Новости" [online], 29 VIII 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://ria.ru/20200829/vybory-157646411.html>>.

29 А. Федоров, Готов...; Путин поддерживает...; Е. Прейгерман, На честном слове и одном крыле, "Minsk Dialogue" [online], 4 IX 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://minskdialogue.by/research/opinions/na-chestnom-slove-i-odnom-kryle>>.

On the other hand, the Kremlin could not help but support Lukashenka. This would be an incentive for street protests, an acceptance of the democratic form of the transition of power. The fear of a color revolution fostered dictatorial solidarity.<sup>30</sup> The Kremlin looked at the Belarusian political crisis through the eyes of Lukashenka – in the narrative of the power structures and Putin himself, we were dealing with an unequivocal message – Belarus fell victim to the intrigue of the West. According to Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu, the election protests were part of an attempt to change power in Belarus with the financial and political support of the West:

The aim of these actions was, among others, to interrupt the process of integration within the Union State and to create a split in relations between Russia and Belarus, which was and is the closest neighbour, reliable ally and strategic partner of the Russian Federation.<sup>31</sup>

Previously, similar words were articulated by other influential members of the Kremlin's power elite. The Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergei Naryshkin, in an interview about the events in Belarus, stressed that external forces were trying to change the political system of Belarus by means of unconstitutional measures.<sup>32</sup> According to Naryshkin, Russia and Belarus have been declared a "hybrid war, aimed at destroying their sovereignty [...]. Western countries are taking aggressive actions against us, contrary to international law, but both countries will defend the right to sovereign development and independent choice of the path of development".<sup>33</sup> "Russia and Belarus, together and separately, are constantly objects and

30 А. Ходасевич, *Противники Лукашенко хотят достучаться до Кремля*, "Независимая газета", 7 X 2020.

31 Шойгу: попытка смены власти в Белоруссии была предпринята при поддержке Запада, "Звезда" [online], 27 X 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/20201027117-rI5sR.html?utm\\_source=tvzvezda&utm\\_medium=longpage&utm\\_campaign=longpage&utm\\_term=v1](https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/20201027117-rI5sR.html?utm_source=tvzvezda&utm_medium=longpage&utm_campaign=longpage&utm_term=v1)>.

32 Нарышкин заявил о стремлении неконституционными методами сменить власть в Белоруссии, "Известия" [online], 22 X 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://iz.ru/1077206/2020-10-22/naryshkin-zaiavil-o-stremlenii-nekonstitutcionnymi-metodami-smenit-vlast-v-belorussii>>.

33 Ibidem.

targets of attacks by other states. We must learn to live in conditions of constant threat from the outside, in conditions when the external environment is aggressive, hostile and unfriendly” Dmitry Peskov said in April 2021 on Belarusian television, commenting on the covert operation “Silence”. Adding that “the sensitivity of one of the countries [Belarus] reinforces the threat to the other [Russia]”.<sup>34</sup>

The Kremlin has meticulously used each of the subsequent crises in Belarus’ relations with the West, for example, pointing out the hypocrisy of the West’s actions towards Russia, referring to cases of interference in the affairs of sovereign Belarus. Speaking in front of the joint chambers of the Federal Assembly, Putin did not forget to point out that:

It is significant that such flagrant events [as the attempted coup d’état and the attempted assassination of Lukashenka] have not been criticised by the so-called collective West. None, as if they had not noticed it, everyone pretends that nothing happened. You can have any point of view on the policy of the President of Belarus Alyaksandr Lukashenka. But the organization of state coups, planning political assassinations, including the highest official in the state – this is too much. This beats everything.<sup>35</sup>

The Pratashevich case was also used by the Kremlin to expose the hypocrisy of the West. Representatives of the Kremlin, first of all the minister of foreign affairs – Sergey Lavrov – bravely defended Belarus against charges of air piracy and violation of international law, accusing the West of hastily passing sentences and “demonizing people who are not liked there”.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, “the Belarusian authorities from the first moments after the incident, declared their readiness to participate in an open and

34 *Попытка госпереворота в Беларуси / Операция «Гишина» / Работа спецслужб. Понятная политика плюс*, “You Tube. АТН: новости Беларуси и мира” [online], 21 IV 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tu7lBn9fnfY&feature=youtu.be>>.

35 *Путин отметил отсутствие реакции Запада на предотвращенное покушение на Лукашенко*, “Интерфакс” [online], 21 IV 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.interfax.ru/world/762463>>.

36 *Лавров призвал Запад прекратить демонизировать Белоруссию из-за инцидента с Ryanair*, “ТАСС” [online], 27 V 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://tass.ru/politika/11492163>>.



transparent investigation and to make available all the necessary information and materials”.<sup>37</sup> This incident, as the Kremlin decided to describe the fact of abducting a civilian aircraft using a fake bomb alert and threat of force, was not without precedent, because, as Lavrov noted, in 2013, Austria, at the request of Washington, grounded the plane of the President of Bolivia Evo Morales, and in 2016, Kiev did the same with the plane of Belarusian Airlines on the basis of a decision of the Ukrainian Security Service.<sup>38</sup>

Lavrov, commenting on the Western practice of imposing sanctions on Russia, in July 2021, accused the United States and the European Union of nasty habits, a lack of culture of diplomacy and interest in negotiations.<sup>39</sup> With regard to

an incident in the sky over Belarus with a Ryanair plane. Sanctions have already been announced. The investigation, to which the Belarusian authorities have long been inviting, is taking place within the framework of the International Civil Aviation Organization and is expected to be completed in September. Meanwhile, Western countries, regularly and publicly calling for a fair investigation, have already introduced sanctions. They behave in the same way in other cases, including those concerning the Russian Federation.<sup>40</sup>

From the very beginning of the Belarusian revolution the Kremlin tried to separate the two issues in this and another way – clear support for Belarus (or precisely the political regime), while marginalising the glorification of Lukashenka himself, and all this in a spirit consistent with

37 Ibidem.

38 *Ответ Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С. В. Лаврова на вопрос СМИ в ходе пресс-конференции по итогам переговоров с Министром иностранных дел Греческой Республики Н. Дендиасом, Сочи, 24 мая 2021 года, “Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации”* [online], 24 V 2021 [accessed: 4 II 2022]: <[https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4741680](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4741680)>.

39 *Интервью Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С. В. Лаврова информационному агентству «Интерфакс», Москва, 21 июля 2021 года, “Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации”* [online], 21 VII 2021 [accessed: 4 II 2022]: <[https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4825571](https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4825571)>.

40 Ibidem.

the official anti-Western narrative. This intellectual juggling was masterly presented by Peskov at the onset of the Belarusian revolution:

We do not support Alyaksandr Lukashenka, we support the legitimately elected president of our brotherly republic and we support the rule of law in it [...]. All right, states have every right not to recognize the results of elections, but no state has the right under international law to decide whether the elections were legal or illegal. Neither the EU, Germany, France nor Poland have such powers.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, the protracted political tension in Belarus, opposition protests and Lukashenka's tossing and turning have been used to legitimise the Russian political regime: consolidating the image of Russia as a besieged fortress, attacked from all sides by the West, which deliberately provoked a revolution in Belarus, imposes sanctions on it that also hit Russia and destroys the project of integration of Russia and Belarus; discouraging critical Russians from opposition activity, asking the rhetorical question whether they want a repeat of the Belarusian events; promoting the image of Lukashenka as a provincial politician, a manipulator who is not entirely responsible, inconsistent. Against this background, Putin appears to be a statesman, able to effectively manage the state and, despite bad relations with the West, maintains contacts with its representatives.<sup>42</sup>

### **Migration crisis, red lines and US security guarantees for Russia**

Among the many hostile decisions that Lukashenka made towards the countries of the collective West after August 2020, the greatest impact was on the deepening of tension in relations with the West and the simultaneous dependence on Russia. None of Lukashenka's decisions raised so many doubts as to their independent character (which had already

41 *Песков: Россия поддерживает не Лукашенко, а законность в Белоруссии*, "EA Daily" [online], 13 XI 2020 [accessed: 4 II 2022]: <<https://eadaaily.com/ru/ampnews/2020/11/13/peskov-rossiya-podderzhivaet-ne-lukashenko-a-zakonnost-v-belorussii>>.

42 Н. Фролова, «Колхозник», «прихвостни» и «младшие братья». Как пропаганда Кремля подаёт ситуацию в Беларуси, "Lietuvos nacionalinis radijas ir televizija" [online], 30 VII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/1460053/kolkhoznik-prikhvostni-i-mladshie-brat-ia-kak-propaganda-kremlia-podaiot-situatsiiu-v-belarusi>>.

arisen in the case of the abduction of Raman Pratasyeovich), although the Kremlin strongly rejected any insinuations that Russia was involved in their implementation.

The migration crisis has coincided with another period of increased tension between Russia and the West (which has lasted continuously since 2014 or even since 2008), which is to a decisive extent the result of the concentration of unprecedented numbers of Russian troops near the border with Ukraine, interpreted as a threat of aggression against it. Contrary to the optimistic assumptions that Russia's internal problems are related to the dramatically high number of COVID-19 cases and that the start of Biden-Putin talks will have a positive impact on the de-escalation of tensions, the Kremlin has not felt satisfactory results of entering into dialogue with the new US presidential administration and has begun to accuse the West of generating tension in the Black Sea region, arming Ukraine's army and – more broadly – crossing all possible red lines in relations with Russia.<sup>43</sup>

The migration crisis is seen as at least being inspired by the Kremlin, and it is accepted that it is linked with other disturbing international events involving Russia: the energy crisis in Europe, the gathering of Russian troops on Ukraine's borders, and the Kremlin's information war against the West. According to the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, these events are “elements of one complex – the hybrid war that Russia is waging against Europe and the Euro-Atlantic community”.<sup>44</sup> Representatives of many European countries unequivocally blame the Kremlin for its appearance and escalation. The UK foreign secretary called on Vladimir Putin to intervene in the “shameful manufactured migrant crisis” at the border of Belarus and Poland. Liz Truss insisted the UK will not look away as she urged Russia to take clear responsibility for ending the dispute involving thousands of migrants and Polish

43 А. Бадюк, “Путин отвлекает внимание от Крыма”: зачем Россия стягивает свою армию к границам Украины, “Крым. Реалии” [online], 17 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://ru.krymr.com/a/armiya-rossii-vozhle-granits-ukrainy-krym/31565507.html?fbclid=IwAR3u1VFtXqhw5C69yYujwjABhri7UA9kK\\_PYR7cuDfxjcz8RzXkos-8cp-A](https://ru.krymr.com/a/armiya-rossii-vozhle-granits-ukrainy-krym/31565507.html?fbclid=IwAR3u1VFtXqhw5C69yYujwjABhri7UA9kK_PYR7cuDfxjcz8RzXkos-8cp-A)>.

44 Кулеба: “мигранты Лукашенко”, дорогой газ и маневры вокруг Украины – часть гибридной войны РФ, “Европейская правда” [online], 15 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/news/2021/11/15/7130293/>>.

troops: “Russia has a clear responsibility here. It must press the Belarusian authorities to end the crisis and enter into dialogue”.<sup>45</sup> Many analysts and Central and Eastern Europe politicians (especially Ukrainian ones) see in these events the direct involvement of the Kremlin, which with the help of Belarus implemented its long-term plans for confrontation with the West. Former Ukrainian Ambassador to Belarus Roman Bessmertny sees the migration crisis as a fragment of a long-term war between the Russian secret services and the European Union, the ultimate goal of which is to dismantle the latter, and the means to discredit Europe and expose its powerlessness in the face of similar challenges.<sup>46</sup>

Considering the problem of Russian participation in the escalation of the border crisis, Artyom Shraybman notes that, firstly: “there is no direct evidence confirming a similar thesis”, secondly, the Kremlin “had the opportunity to influence Minsk’s actions and if it did not do so, therefore it should be assumed that it had nothing against them”, and last but not least, “Russia leaves its allies some room for manoeuvre, autonomy, as regards the implementation of foreign policy, as long as it does not harm its interests”. Not only Russia, but also Belarus itself benefits from the situation.<sup>47</sup> Belarus has implemented its plans through the migration crisis: 1. to gain revenge on Poland and the Baltic states for helping the Belarusian opposition movement and its most influential representatives; 2. to reaffirm the Kremlin’s loyalty resulting from its anti-Western political stance; 3. to break the international isolation on the part of Western countries, which has been ongoing since August 2020.<sup>48</sup>

45 *Exclusive: Liz Truss tells Vladimir Putin to end “shameful” migrant crisis*, “The Telegraph” [online], 13 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/11/13/exclusive-liz-truss-tells-vladimir-putin-end-shameful-migrant/>>.

46 *Кремль добивается признания Лукашенко президентом? Чем мигрантский кризис похож на войну в Украине*, “Радіо Свобода” [online], 11 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/migranty-putin-lukashenko/31556390.html>>.

47 *А. Шрайбман, Будет ли Кремль вмешиваться в белорусский миграционный кризис?*, “Media-Polesye” [online], 8 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://media-polesye.by/news/budet-li-kreml-vmeshivatsya-v-belorusskij-migracziornyj-krizis/>>.

48 *А. Сивицкий, Беларусь: от донорства стабильности и безопасности к «эскалации для деэскалации». В чем стратегический расчет и просчет Минска?*, “Belarus Security Blog” [online], 9 IX 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://bsblog>>.

Russia – regardless of whether it took an active part in its preparation or watched Lukashenka’s actions with folded hands – took full advantage of these events to thoroughly criticise the West. First of all, the Kremlin accused Western countries, in particular Poland, of their humanitarian obligations, violations of human and civil rights, and international obligations. Particular emphasis was placed on the fact of the “abuse of refugees, children, pregnant women, the use of chemicals, tear gas, smoke grenades, or adding skin irritants (pesticides and herbicides) to water cannons”.<sup>49</sup>

Another recurring motif in the Kremlin’s anti-Western information war during the migration crisis is the accusation that European countries are applying a policy of double standards. According to Lavrov, the Polish side did not allow foreign journalists to enter the border zone (CNN, BBC), imprisoned other journalists (Russia Today France) (while they worked freely on the Belarusian side), did not allow specialised EU agencies to adequately react and help migrants, and Brussels allowed Warsaw to take actions inconsistent with the principles and values that it declares and which it requires from other countries. Putin also reminded the Polish side of the criticism of the actions of Ukrainian special services against protesters during the events in Ukraine at the turn of 2013/2014.<sup>50</sup>

The third key element of Russia’s information war about the migration crisis is the responsibility of the West itself for its outbreak. The Kremlin has made it clear that it intends to engage in its solution, although it is not a party to this crisis. Putin made it clear: “We have nothing to do with it. Everyone is trying to shift the responsibility onto us for no reason”. With disarming honesty, he said that he learned about the crisis mounting on the Polish-Belarusian border from... newspapers, he did not discuss this

info/belarus-ot-donorstva-stabilnosti-i-bezopasnosti-k-eskalacii-dlya-deeskalacii-v-chem-strategicheskij-raschet-i-proschet-minska/>.

- 49 *Путин раскритиковал Польшу за действия силовиков на границе*, “Regnum” [online], 18 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3426926.html>>; *Минск делает все, что от него зависит, в связи с миграционным кризисом, ситуацию надо деполитизировать*, “Интерфакс – АВН” [online], 5 XII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.militarynews.ru/story.asp?rid=1&nid=561734&lang=RU%D1%82>>.
- 50 *Лавров: ЕС применяет двойные стандарты в ситуации с мигрантами на границе Польши*, “ТАСС” [online], 16 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://tass.ru/politika/12938015>>.

topic with Lukashenka at an early time, only when the situation became critical (in the first days of November) did they have two talks on this subject. Belarus itself can no longer stop migrants from storming its western borders because of Western sanctions.<sup>51</sup>

Putin, surprised by the unflagging attempts to put responsibility for the crisis on Belarus and, more bizarrely, on Russia, argues that migrants are still trying and will try to get to Europe in one way or another, and the fact that they choose the Belarusian route is due to the lack of a visa requirement for citizens of the many countries affected by crises.<sup>52</sup> Putin has made it clear that Europe is trying to shift its own migrant problems onto Russia, which it has not been able to solve for years, suggesting that Europe should focus on its own affairs. According to Putin, the causes of the migration crisis are of a complex nature: political, military and economic. First of all, military actions with the participation of European countries led to the destabilisation of Iraq and Afghanistan, and, according to Putin, both Kurds and Afghans are dominant among the refugees. According to Putin, the economic dimension of the Belarusian migration crisis, as well as any other in the case of Europe, results from extensive social security, especially in Germany.<sup>53</sup>

The UK government has also received a reply from the Russian Foreign Ministry that the migration crisis was carefully crafted by UK. Maria Zakharova replied on her Telegram channel that:

British intervention in Iraq was indeed a carefully crafted crisis. 45,000 British troops helped the United States to occupy, kill its citizens and plunder its resources. Britain bears a clear historical responsibility for everything that has been happening in the region since then – the deaths of Iraqis, the disintegration of Iraq, waves of migrants, the emergence of the Islamic State, humanitarian disasters in this part of the world.

51 *Путин: Россия...; Минск делает...*

52 *Путин: Россия...*

53 *Президент России В.В. Путин ответил на вопросы журналиста телеканала «Россия 1» Павла Зарубина, 13 ноября 2021 года, “Посольство Российской Федерации в Соединенном Королевстве Великобритании и Северной Ирландии” [online], 13 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.rus.rusemb.org.uk/fnpr/6009>>.*

Until London is held accountable for its crimes, its official representatives have no right to blame anyone.<sup>54</sup>

The Kremlin, consistently rejecting accusations of being involved in the migration crisis, has promised to help negotiate with Belarus, while at the same time sending concerned EU leaders to talks with Lukashenka, whom they do not recognise. However, the condition for taking these actions is to break the isolation of Belarus and establish a direct dialogue between representatives of the EU and the Belarusian authorities. A similar breakthrough has also been achieved in the sphere of contacts with EU institutions. Thanks to the Kremlin's involvement, Lukashenka has managed to at least partially break international isolation in contacts with Western European countries. In this way, Russia has managed not only to force the West to enter into talks with Lukashenka – which in itself is humiliating – but also: 1. to prove that the policy of isolation and sanctions is not the solution; 2. without the participation of Russia, it is not possible to solve security problems in Europe.<sup>55</sup>

The migration crisis has been seamlessly intertwined with the escalation of tension in Russia-West relations, stimulated by the dramatically growing presence of Russian troops near the border with Ukraine, and has served as an increase in pressure in the process of negotiating an agreement with the United States. Putin, speaking in November 2021 at the enlarged college of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a veiled way, made it clear that Russia, by responding to ignoring Russian warnings, consistent crossing red lines by the West and lack of readiness to provide Russia with security guarantees, contributed to the fact that in the West “there was indeed tension [...] that should last as long as possible, so that the West does not provoke some

54 М. Захарова, [Глава МИД Британии Лиз Трасс заявила: «Россия несёт здесь чёткую ответственность...», “Telegram” [online], 14 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://t.me/MariaVladimirovnaZakharova/1302>>.

55 Макей и Боррель обсудили ситуацию на границе Белоруссии и ЕС, “ТАСС” [online], 16 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/12943307>>.

kind of conflict on the western border [Russia]”.<sup>56</sup> Russian media perceived Putin’s words about generating tension as an allusion to the migration crisis at that time and a desire to use it and other similar activities (gathering troops on the borders of Ukraine) in order to achieve two fundamental goals, unchanged for years, of Russian foreign policy: “to oppose the expansion of Western influence while trying to set a framework for permissible interference in one’s own affairs”.<sup>57</sup>

During his speech, Putin also referred directly to the issue of the migration crisis itself, treating the events on the Polish-Belarusian border as a form of aggression on the part of the West against Belarus and a deliberate building of tension in the region close to Russia through the migration crisis.<sup>58</sup> During the same speech, Putin instructed Lavrov to obtain from the West “serious and long-term security guarantees [...]. Russia cannot function in such tension [an atmosphere of constant threat from NATO and the United States – M.S., M.K.]”.<sup>59</sup>

Russian proposals on the security guarantee laid out on 17 December 2021 by the Russian Foreign Ministry call for an end to NATO’s eastward expansion and limitations on the alliance’s military activity in Eastern Europe, including cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia. Moscow has underscored that it is seeking bilateral talks exclusively with the United States. The proposals, which would roll back many of the security advances NATO has made in Eastern Europe and former Soviet states since the late 1990s, come as tensions between Washington and the Kremlin reach a post-Cold War high amid Moscow’s alleged attempts to carve out a sphere of influence in its near-abroad.<sup>60</sup> For many commentators, the Russian ulti-

56 *Расширенное заседание коллегии МИД. Владимир Путин принял участие в расширенном заседании коллегии Министерства иностранных дел, “Президент России”* [online], 18 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 II 2022]: <<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67123>>.

57 Г. Петров, *Россия заговорит на языке “красных линий”, “Независимая газета”, 18 XI 2021; Расширенное заседание...*

58 *Ibidem.*

59 *Ibidem.*

60 *Russia’s proposal to redraw European security “unacceptable,” U.S. says, “Radio Free Europe. Radio Liberty”* [online], 17 XII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.rferl.org/a/nato-russia-security-guarantees/31614168.html>>.



matum came as a shock, but, as some analysts soberly observe, Moscow's proposals should not have been a surprise to people who have been following the issue.<sup>61</sup>

### The price Lukashenka had to pay...

During the migration crisis, the Kremlin actually increased tension in Western countries through Belarus. Russia supported Minsk in the form of military demonstrations at the Polish-Belarusian border. These actions consisted, among others, of Tu-22 bombers flying along the borders between Belarus and NATO member states, bombing exercises with the participation of Tu-160s, and parachuting drills on Belarusian training grounds near the borders with Poland and Lithuania.<sup>62</sup> The help that Russia gave to Lukashenka during this period has received many comments. Most of them share the conviction that it was neither selfless nor unequivocally useful for Lukashenka himself:

By demonstrating its support for Minsk, also in the military dimension, in its confrontation with the West, Moscow is preparing its Belarusian partners for readiness to escalate events, after which no member of the current two governments will be able to take part in talks with the West on the normalisation of relations.<sup>63</sup>

Soon those words turned out to be prophetic, as Lukashenka's Belarus had been forced to join Russia in her invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

Russia has benefited from the political crisis in Belarus, Lukashenka's damaged legitimacy, his anti-Western phobias, and the growing economic

61 A. A. Baklitskiy, *Putin's demand for security guarantees: Not new and not to be taken literally, but not to be ignored*, "Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists" [online], 14 I 2022 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://thebulletin.org/2022/01/putins-demand-for-security-guarantees-not-new-and-not-to-be-taken-literally-but-not-to-be-ignored/>>.

62 *Эксперты: Реальные цели Кремля могут оказаться далеко не столь вдохновляющими для белорусского режима*, "Ex-Press" [online], 16 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://ex-press.by/rubrics/politika/2021/11/16/eksperty-realnye-celi-kremlya-mogut-okazatsya-daleko-ne-stol-vдохновляющими-для-белорусского-режима>>.

63 Ibidem.

problems of the Belarusian state, which are the result of Western sanctions on many fronts.<sup>64</sup>

Lukashenka, obsessed with the idea of maintaining power at any cost and pursuing that goal, was trying to assure the Kremlin of his loyalty and seeking more help from Russia as the West continued its policy of sanctions against his regime. Given that the siloviks faction in Russia was the most influential one in the Russian political system at the time, and its representatives sympathised with Lukashenka (in contrast to the Kremlin liberals, who would have preferred to get rid of Lukashenka, who had been parasitising the Russian budget for far too long) and promoted a fraternal narrative in bilateral relations, the choice of deepening bilateral integration in the area of defence and security seemed natural after August 2020. The Russian siloviks faction is a representative of offensive revisionism, and one of its long-standing dreams with regard to confrontation with the West is to establish a fully-fledged Russian military base in Belarus.

Deepening cooperation in the area of defence and security took institutionalised and *ad hoc* forms.<sup>65</sup> The security councils of both countries, the Russian National Guard and the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, as well as the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service and the Belarusian KGB, have cooperated closely in response to “destructive” Western activities in the wake of Minsk’s highly criticised plane diversion to arrest a dissident.<sup>66</sup> However, the most spectacular was in the dimension of military cooperation, which, according to the agreement of 2 March 2021, provided for the framework of a five-year plan of military cooperation:

It involves the organization of more than 160 joint activities, 40% of which are to be field exercises. They also decided to create three joint training centers for the armed forces. A training and combat center

64 *Объем засекреченного экспорта Беларуси в Россию вырос в восемь раз и составил 1,3 млрд долларов*, “Зеркало” [online], 18 X 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/4419.html?c>>.

65 *Россия и Беларусь заявили о предотвращении переворота и покушения на Лукашенко. Их якобы планировали на 9 мая*, “BBC News” [online], 17 IV 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-56770162>>.

66 С. Н. Иванов, *На защите интересов союзного государства*, “Службы внешней разведки Российской Федерации” [online], 3 VI 2021 [accessed: 4 II 2022]: <<http://svr.gov.ru/smi/2021/06/na-zashchite-interesov-soyuznogo-gosudarstva.htm>>.

for the air forces and air defense units is to be built on Belarusian territory in Hrodna Voblast.<sup>67</sup>

In 2020, Lukashenka announced the creation of another training centre in Belarus, this time with the tactical ballistic missile system Iskander.<sup>68</sup>

In February 2020, on Lukashenka's initiative, the largest military exercise since the collapse of the Soviet Union was carried out on the territory of Belarus – “Union Resolve 2022”.<sup>69</sup> This was both a test of the mobile efficiency of Russian troops and the scenario of the manoeuvres themselves focused on the war with Ukraine, which was about to begin. The tightening of institutional ties ended with the symbolic extension of the agreement on Russia's continued lease of two military facilities which are crucial for its defence, and with the signing of a new defence doctrine of the union state, which emphasises the need for close cooperation between the two countries in the face of growing pressure from the West and increased tension in the region.<sup>70</sup>

With his statements and actions Lukashenka began to support Russia's anti-West and anti-Ukrainian narratives and fully backed the Kremlin's information war against the West. His statements in the sphere of foreign and defence policy began to be filled with “the most aggressive content, transferred from the arsenal of Russian propaganda [...]. In particular, Russian narratives towards Ukraine were strong, which had not previously appeared in Lukashenka's statements”.<sup>71</sup> And this is no coincidence, as

67 A. M. Dyner, *Belarus and Russia. Accelerated integration*, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, [Warsaw] 30 VI 2021 (Bulletin, 125 (1821)).

68 Лукашенко заявил о планах обсудить с Путиным дальнейшие шаги совместной группировки войск, “ТАСС” [online], 17 II 2022 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/13738109?fbclid=IwAR3onwBAegjs6MjL6tsAjRW4z7a9CNS1\\_HCGS-r2pNRLRWLzLlnqmpER7RI](https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/13738109?fbclid=IwAR3onwBAegjs6MjL6tsAjRW4z7a9CNS1_HCGS-r2pNRLRWLzLlnqmpER7RI)>.

69 Л. Спаткай, “Союзная решимость-2022”: стратегические учения или подготовка к вторжению в Украину?, “Belarus Security Blog” [online], 2 II 2022 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://bsblog.info/soyuznaya-reshimost-2022-strategicheskie-ucheniya-ili-podgotovka-k-vtorzheniyu-v-ukrainu/>>.

70 P. Luzin, *Military integration of the Union State*, “Riddle Russia” [online], 20 II 2022 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://ridl.io/en/military-integration-of-the-union-state/?fbclid=IwAR1VxA2jnhazfWvSoUFODTrTukOl9orKc7qUvuB6ab6SLO2Bu7LsonIjLZI>>.

71 И. Левченко, *Беларуская угроза. Станет ли Лукашенко инструментом агрессии России*, “Belarus Security Blog” [online], 8 XII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://bsblog.info/belaruskaya-ugroza-stanet-li-lukashenko-instrumentom-agressii-rossii/>>.

[the] Kremlin dispatched teams of seasoned spin doctors to “improve” the coverage of the protests on Belarusian television after scores of local journalists quit in protest. Russia Today sent 32 reporters, and another three Russian networks dispatched several staffers each. Belarusians immediately noticed the dramatic difference in the editing, tone and tenor of television reports on the protests.<sup>72</sup>

Russia used the territory of Belarus even more strongly for military pressure on Ukraine directly and indirectly on the West. From the point of view of Ukraine’s national security, the deepening military integration of Russia and Belarus turned out to be a critical threat.<sup>73</sup>

Even if the integration process of the two states somewhat stalled, despite Putin and Lukashenka’s approval of 28 Union Programs for integrating Russia and Belarus on 4 November 2021, the Kremlin succeeded in curtailing Belarus’ strategic autonomy once and for all. Not by reaching a certain agreement or performing a controlled transition of power in Belarus, accompanied by constitutional changes, but by forcing Lukashenka to take part in aggression against Ukraine, which bound the two states together stronger than any political accord.

## Summary

Against the background of an unprecedented social protest against Lukashenka’s regime and deterioration of its relations with the West, Belarusian cooperation with Russia has significantly changed. Never in the period after 2000, that is, since Vladimir Putin took office in Russia, have relations between the two countries been so close. Military and national security cooperation came to the fore. Representatives of the power bloc have overshadowed the Kremlin’s liberals’ efforts to economically subjugate Belarus or, at least, limit the current scale of subsidies to the fraternal

72 M. Mirovalev, *How Russian media is trying to save Lukashenko’s Belarus*, “Al Jazeera” [online], 12 IX 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/18/how-russian-media-is-trying-to-save-lukashenkos-belarus>>.

73 И. Левченко, *Беларуская...*; P. Felgenhauer, *Russian troops deploy to Belarus with fanfare*, “Eurasia Daily Monitor” 2022, vol. 19, issue 3: <[https://jamestown.org/program/russian-troops-deploy-to-belarus-with-fanfare/?fbclid=IwAROUwKJmEaocGD8CFgEajG5ITb7MTODzmt6RimnkanSa854nDNNc\\_zwczO](https://jamestown.org/program/russian-troops-deploy-to-belarus-with-fanfare/?fbclid=IwAROUwKJmEaocGD8CFgEajG5ITb7MTODzmt6RimnkanSa854nDNNc_zwczO)> [accessed: 4 III 2022].

republic. The basis for the rapprochement between the two countries is the confrontation with the West, which has imposed harsh sanctions against Belarus and its key political figures as a response to the crack-down on opposition protests and violation of international law.

This has opened up additional opportunities for Russia, both in terms of pursuing its own agenda in relation to the West, supporting the process of legitimising the domestic political regime, and finally solving long-standing problems in relations with Minsk, concerning its excessive autonomy – now fully dependent on Russia.

In the past, the Kremlin has always supported the Lukashenka regime and defended it against accusations of human and civil rights violations by the West. But during the current political crisis, it has not constrained itself to standard defensive declarations, but has moved onto an information offensive – Russia's post-August 2020 narrative linked the people's protest in Belarus with the West's normative hegemony (being cover for geopolitical attacks) and its hostility against Russia. Moreover, the Kremlin's information war began to be accompanied by attempts to physically use the territory of Belarus and its resources in the process of confrontation with the West centred around Ukraine.

The Belarusian protests, allegedly sponsored by the West, perfectly fit into the Kremlin's traditional anti-Western confrontational narrative. The Kremlin's actions in the case of Belarus are aimed at defending the "universal norms and values" being allegedly disrespected by the West, not any specific persons (Lukashenka). And there is a strong sense of auto-narrative, because when talking about the West's aggression against Belarus, the Kremlin is preoccupied with Russia and its struggle with the "West's normative hegemony and geopolitical pretenses". The challenges faced by Belarus are the same as those of Russia itself, against which the West has for years pursued a policy of encircling and interfering in its internal affairs, violating its sovereignty, devastating the principle of international law and using the policy of *fait accompli*.

Russia has benefited from the political crisis in Belarus. It was extensively used in the information war against the West, and lately Lukashenka's dependent status has helped the Kremlin to use Belarusian resources in its confrontation with Ukraine. Foreign policy implemented by the Kremlin in the aftermath of the Belarusian revolution bore the clear features of a revisionist policy. Referring to the three research perspectives

on Russian revisionism: offensive, defensive and isolationist, it should be noted that during the protracted tension in relations between Belarus and the West, Russia implemented the full spectrum.

In the offensive (revanchist) perspective against the background of the opposition protests in Belarus, the abduction of the Ryanair plane, and the migration crisis, there was a fundamental and comprehensive criticism of the normative hegemony of the West, revealing its hypocrisy of attempts to take action to discredit some EU member states and make a breach in the policy of European unity and test the cohesion of the West; efforts to expand Russia's sphere of influence, in the political, military and territorial dimensions, among others by sanctioning territorial gains at the expense of Ukraine – for this purpose, Russia has gathered and used armed forces using Lukashenka's dependence on the Kremlin.

In the defensive perspective, Russia has tried to stop the process of institutionalising Ukraine's ties with NATO, and strengthening military cooperation with the United States, including its growing presence in Ukraine. By formulating an ultimatum on security, Russia expressed concern for its security and manifested its determination to be heard. Russia wanted its interests were taken into account, and treated as an equal partner by the United States. With regard to European countries, a clear message was formulated during the migration crisis – Russia is an indispensable element of the European security architecture.

Finally, in isolationist terms, the Kremlin's propaganda, mainly through journalistic programmes and talk shows, used the Belarusian protests and the deepening confrontation between Belarus and the West to stabilise the level of legitimacy of its own regime in the face of protracted COVID-19 problems and the upcoming elections to the State Duma.

## Bibliography

Astapenia R., *Why the Belarusian revolution has stalled*, "Chatham House" [online], 9 II 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/02/why-belarusian-revolution-has-stalled>>.

Badúk A., *"Putin otvlekaet vnimanie ot Kryma": začem Rossiâ stâgivaet svoju armiu k granicam Ukrainy*, "Krym. Realii" [online], 17 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://ru.krymr.com/a/armiya-rossii-vozle-granits-ukrainy-krym/31565507.html?fbclid=IwAR3u1VFTxqhw5C69yYywjABhRi7UA9kK\\_PYR7cuDfxjcz8RzXkos-8cp-A](https://ru.krymr.com/a/armiya-rossii-vozle-granits-ukrainy-krym/31565507.html?fbclid=IwAR3u1VFTxqhw5C69yYywjABhRi7UA9kK_PYR7cuDfxjcz8RzXkos-8cp-A)>.

- Baklitskiy A. A., *Putin's demand for security guarantees: Not new and not to be taken literally, but not to be ignored*, "Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists" [online], 14 I 2022 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://thebulletin.org/2022/01/putins-demand-for-security-guarantees-not-new-and-not-to-be-taken-literally-but-not-to-be-ignored/>>.
- Belarus, *Russia and the union state*, "Russian Public Opinion Research Center Press Release" [online], 9 VII 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://wciom.com/index.php?id=61&uid=1794>>.
- Dorohov V., Volkov D., *Glava "Levada-Centra": Obšee otnošenje rossiân k sankciâm – Zapad protiv nas*, "Levada-Centr" [online], 16 VI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.levada.ru/2021/06/10/glava-levada-tsentra-obshhee-otnoshenie-rossiyan-k-sanktsiyam-zapad-protiv-nas/?fbclid=IwAR3v-CmBLK7LHCTThac u2evZfEPI-CbZpNTEHhH6ias7IX58f685Ujvt86U>>.
- Dyner A. M., *Belarus and Russia. Accelerated integration*, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, [Warsaw] 30 VI 2021 (Bulletin, 125 (1821)).
- Eckle M., *Pentagon chief calls Russia, China "revisionist powers"*, "Radio Free Europe. Radio Liberty" [online], 19 I 2018 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.rferl.org/a/pentagon-mattis-calls-russia-china-revisionist-powers/28985632.html>>.
- Exclusive: *Liz Truss tells Vladimir Putin to end "shameful" migrant crisis*, "The Telegraph" [online], 13 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/11/13/exclusive-liz-truss-tells-vladimir-putin-end-shameful-migrant/>>.
- Èksperty: *Real'nye celi Kremlâ mogut okazat'sâ daleko ne stol' vdohnovlâûsimi dlâ belorusskogo režima*, "Ex-Press" [online], 16 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://ex-press.by/rubrics/politika/2021/11/16/eksperty-realnye-celi-kremlya-mogut-oka zatsya-daleko-ne-stol-vdoxnovlyayushhimi-dlya-belorusskogo-rezhima>>.
- Fedorov A., *Gotov li Kreml' vzât' na sebâ otvetstvennost' za vsë, što proizojdet v Belarusi?*, "Ex-Press" [online], 18 X 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://ex-press.by/rubrics/politika/2020/10/18/gotov-li-kreml-vzyat-na-sebya-otvetstvennost-za-vsyo-chto-proizojdet-v-belarusi>>.
- Felgenhauer P., *Russian troops deploy to Belarus with fanfare*, "Eurasia Daily Monitor" 2022, vol. 19, issue 3: <[https://jamestown.org/program/russian-troops-deploy-to-belarus-with-fanfare/?fbclid=IwAR0uWkGJmEaocGD8CFgEajG5ITb7MTOD zmt6Rimnkans854nDNNc\\_zwczo](https://jamestown.org/program/russian-troops-deploy-to-belarus-with-fanfare/?fbclid=IwAR0uWkGJmEaocGD8CFgEajG5ITb7MTOD zmt6Rimnkans854nDNNc_zwczo)> [accessed: 4 III 2022].
- Frolova N., «Kolhoznik», «prihvostni» i «mladšie brat'â». *Kak propaganda Kremlâ podaët situaciû v Belarusi*, "Lietuvos nacionalinis radijas ir televizija" [online], 30 VII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti/17/1460053/kolkhoznik-prihvostni-i-mladshie-brat-ia-kak-propaganda-kremlia-podaiot-situatsiiu-v-belarusi>>.
- Götz E., Merlen C.-R., *Russia and the question of world order*, "European Politics and Society" 2019, vol. 20, No. 2.
- Gromova A., *Putin rasskazal, kak Evropa delila Rossiû na neskol'ko stran v 90-e*, "Gazeta" [online], 12 XII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2021/12/12\\_a\\_14307259.shtml?updated](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2021/12/12_a_14307259.shtml?updated)>.

- Hodasevič A., *Protivniki Lukašenko hotât dostučat'sâ do Kremlâ*, "Nezavisimaa gazeta", 7 X 2020.
- Howlett D., *The future of strategic culture*, Defense Threat Reduction Agency Advanced Systems and Concepts Office, 31 X 2006: <<https://irp.fas.org/agency/dod/dtra/stratcult-future.pdf>> [accessed: 4 III 2022].
- Ikenberry G. J., *The end of liberal international order?*, "International Affairs" 2018, vol. 94, No. 1.
- Intervû Ministra inostrannyh del Rossijskoj Federacii S. V. Lavrova informacionnomu agentstvu «Interfaks», Moskva, 21 iûlâ 2021 goda*, "Ministerstvo inostrannyh del Rossijskoj Federacii" [online], 21 VII 2021 [accessed: 4 II 2022]: <[https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/CKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4825571](https://archive.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/CKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4825571)>.
- Ivanov S. N., *Na zašite interesov soûznogo gosudarstva*, "Služby vnešnej razvedki Rossijskoj Federacii" [online], 3 VI 2021 [accessed: 4 II 2022]: <<http://svr.gov.ru/smi/2021/06/na-zashchite-interesov-soyuznogo-gosudarstva.htm>>.
- Karl T. L., Schmitter Ph., *Models of transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe*, "International Social Science Journal" 1991, vol. 43, No. 128.
- Kazharski A., Kubová M., *Belarus as a liminal space for Russia's ontological security before and after the 2020 protests*, "New Perspectives" 2021, vol. 29, No. 3.
- Klinke I., *Geopolitical narratives on Belarus in contemporary Russia*, "Perspectives" 2008, vol. 16, No. 1.
- Kreml' dobivaetsâ priznaniâ Lukašenko prezidentom? Ćem migrantskij krizis pohož na vojnu v Ukraine*, "Radio Svoboda" [online], 11 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/migranty-putin-lukashenko/31556390.html>>.
- Kuleba: *"migranty Lukašenko", dorogoj gaz i manevry vokrûg Ukrainy – Ćast' gibridnoj vojny RF*, "Evropejskaâ pravda" [online], 15 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/rus/news/2021/11/15/7130293/>>.
- Lavrov: ES primenâet dvojnye standarty v situacii s migrantami na granice Pol'si*, "TASS" [online], 16 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://tass.ru/politika/12938015>>.
- Lavrov prizval Zapad prekratit' demonizirovat' Belorussii iz-za incidenta s Ryanair*, "TASS" [online], 27 V 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://tass.ru/politika/11492163>>.
- Lavrov: rukovodstvo Belorussii priznaet, Ćto vybory ne byli ideal'nymi*, "Gazeta" [online], 19 VIII 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2020/08/19/n\\_14819515.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2020/08/19/n_14819515.shtml)>.
- Levĉenko I., *Belaruskaâ ugroza. Stanet li Lukašenko instrumentom aĝressii Rossii*, "Belarus Security Blog" [online], 8 XII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://bsblog.info/belaruskaya-ugroza-stanet-li-lukashenko-instrumentom-aĝressii-rossii/>>.
- Levinson A., *Pust' Aleksandr Lukašenko pravit*, "v Times" [online], 3 XI 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.vtimes.io/2020/11/03/pochemu-belorussiiane-pohozha-na-rossiyu-a1245>>.
- Levinson A., *Rossia bez Belorussii*, "Vedomosti", 20 I 2020.
- Luk'ânov F., *Ćto nado sdelat' Moskve, Ćtoby privâzannost' k nej Belorussii ne zavisela ot Lukašenko*, "Profil" [online], 10 VIII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://profile>>.



- ru/abroad/chto-nado-sdelat-moskve-chtoby-privyazannost-k-nej-belorussii-ne-zavisela-ot-lukashenko-907191/>.
- Lukašenko rasskazał o gotovivšemsâ pokušenii na nego i ego synovej, "Izvestiâ" [online], 17 IV 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://iz.ru/1153046/2021-04-17/lukashenko-rasskazał-o-zaderzhanii-planirovavshei-pokushenie-na-ego-detei-gruppy?fbclid=IwAR2giriM1xPouO19\\_vJnCrzNiupbJfbDu3ccbz7\\_mv6PWSG\\_bnivlab7\\_4k](https://iz.ru/1153046/2021-04-17/lukashenko-rasskazał-o-zaderzhanii-planirovavshei-pokushenie-na-ego-detei-gruppy?fbclid=IwAR2giriM1xPouO19_vJnCrzNiupbJfbDu3ccbz7_mv6PWSG_bnivlab7_4k)>.
- Lukašenko zaâvil o planah obsudit' s Putinyim dal'nejšie šagi sovместnoj gruppirovki vojsk, "TASS" [online], 17 II 2022 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://tass.ru/mezhdu-narodnaya-panorama/13738109?fbclid=IwAR3onwBAegis6MjL6tsAjRW4z7a9CNS1\\_HCGs-r2pNRlRwLzLlnqmpER7RI](https://tass.ru/mezhdu-narodnaya-panorama/13738109?fbclid=IwAR3onwBAegis6MjL6tsAjRW4z7a9CNS1_HCGs-r2pNRlRwLzLlnqmpER7RI)>.
- Luzin P., *Military integration of the Union State*, "Riddle Russia" [online], 20 II 2022 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://ridl.io/en/military-integration-of-the-union-state/?fbclid=IwARivxA2jnhaz3fWvsoUFODTPTukol9orkc7qUvuB6ab6sLO2Bu7LsonIjIzI>>.
- Macfarlane S. N., *The "R" in BRICS. Is Russia an emerging power?*, "International Affairs" 2006, vol. 82, No. 1.
- Makej i Borrel' obsudili situaciû na granice Belorussii i ES, "TASS" [online], 16 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/12943307>>.
- Minsk delaet vse, što ot nego zavisit, v svâzi s migracionnym krizisom, situaciû nado depolitizirovat', "Interfaks – AVN" [online], 5 XII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.militarynews.ru/story.asp?rid=1&nid=561734&lang=RU%D1%82>>.
- Mirovalev M., *How Russian media is trying to save Lukashenko's Belarus*, "Al Jazeera" [online], 12 IX 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/18/how-russian-media-is-trying-to-save-lukashenkos-belarus>>.
- Mnogie gosudarstvennye SMI v Rossii ne spešat podderživat' Aleksandra Lukašenko. Polučaetsâ, Kreml' bol'she v nego ne verit?, "Meduza" [online], 19 VIII 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://meduza.io/feature/2020/08/19/mnogie-gosudarstvennye-smi-v-rossii-ne-speshat-podderzhivat-aleksandra-lukashenko-poluchaetsya-kreml-bolshe-v-nego-ne-verit>>.
- Moshes A., Nizhnikau R., *The Belarusian revolution: Sources, interim outcomes, and lessons to be learned*, "Demokratizatsiya: The journal of post-Soviet democratization" 2021, vol. 29, No. 2.
- Mudrov S. A., *Doomed to fail? Why success was almost not an option in the 2020 protests in Belarus*, "Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe" 2021, vol. 29, issue 1.
- Naryškin zaâvil o stremlenii nekonstitucionnymi metodami smenit' vlast' v Belorussii, "Izvestiâ" [online], 22 X 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://iz.ru/1077206/2020-10-22/naryshkin-zaiavil-o-stremlenii-nekonstitucionnymi-metodami-smenit-vlast-v-belorussii>>.
- Nikolûk S., *Čtoby slučilis' izmeneniâ, dolžen proizožti ne raskol, a spločenie elit*, "Svobodnye novosti plûs" [online], 6 IV 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.sn-plus.com/2021/04/06/chtoby-sluchilis-izmeneniya-dolzhen-proizožti-ne-raskol-a-splochenie-elit>>.

- Ob'em zasekrečennogo ěksporta Belarusi v Rossiũ vyros v vosem' raz i sostavil 1,3 mlrd dollarov*, "Zerkalo" [online], 18 X 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/4419.html?c>>.
- Obrašenie Koordinacionnogo soveta k rossijskoj obšestvennosti i oficial'nym licam*, "Koordinacionnyj sovet" [online], 14 IX 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://rada.vision/obrashhenie-koordinacionnogo-soveta-k-rossijskoj-obshhestvennosti-i-oficialnym-licam>>.
- Otveta Ministra inostrannyh del Rossijskoj Federacii S. V. Lavrova na vopros SMI v hode press-konferencii po itogam peregovorov s Ministrom inostrannyh del Grečeskoj Respubliki N. Dendiasom, Soči, 24 maã 2021 goda*, "Ministerstvo inostrannyh del Rossijskoj Federacii" [online], 24 V 2021 [accessed: 4 II 2022]: <[https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/CKNonkJE02BW/content/id/4741680](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/CKNonkJE02BW/content/id/4741680)>.
- Pastuhov V., *Revolúciã othodit s Belorusskogo vokzala*, "Novaã gazeta", 18 IX 2020.
- Percev A., Lysova T., Rustamova F., *Putin podderživaet Lukašenko? Kreml' rešil, čto delat' s Belarus'ú? Spojler: kažetsã, nikakogo plana u Moskvy net*, "Meduza" [online], 19 IX 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://meduza.io/feature/2020/09/19/putin-podderzhivaet-lukashenko-kreml-reshil-cto-delat-s-belarusyu>>.
- Peskov: Rossiã podderživaet ne Lukašenko, a zakonnost' v Belorussii*, "EA Daily" [online], 13 XI 2020 [accessed: 4 II 2022]: <<https://easily.com/ru/ampnews/2020/11/13/peskov-rossiya-podderzhivaet-ne-lukashenko-a-zakonnost-v-belorussii>>.
- Petrov G., *Rossiã zağovorit na äzyke "krasnyh linij"*, "Nezavisimã gazeta", 18 XI 2021.
- Popytka ĝosperevorota v Belarusi / Operaciã «Tišina» / Rabota specslužb. Ponãtnãã politika plũs*, "You Tube. ATN: novosti Belarusi i mira" [online], 21 IV 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tu7lBn9fnfy&feature=youtu.be>>.
- Prejgerman E., *Na čestnom slove i odnom kryle*, "Minsk Dialogue" [online], 4 IX 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://minskdialogue.by/research/opinions/na-čestnom-slove-i-odnom-kryle>>.
- Prezident Rossii V. V. Putin otvetil na voprosy žurnalista telekanala «Rossiã 1» Pavla Zarubina, 13 noãbrã 2021 goda*, "Posol'stvo Rossijskoj Federacii v Soedinennom Korolevstve Velikobritanii i Severnoj Irlandii" [online], 13 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.rus.rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6009>>.
- Putin otmetil otsutstvie reakcii Zapada na predotvrašennoe pokušenie na Lukašenko*, "Interfaks" [online], 21 IV 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.interfax.ru/world/762463>>.
- Putin priznal legitimnost' prezidentskih vyborov v Belorussii*, "RIA Novosti" [online], 29 VIII 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://ria.ru/20200829/vybory-1576464111.html>>.
- Putin raskritikoval Polšu za dejstviã silovikov na granice*, "Regnum" [online], 18 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3426926.html>>.
- Rassširennoe zasedanie kollegii MID. Vladimir Putin prinãl učasťie v rassširennom zasedanii kollegii Ministerstva inostrannyh del*, "Prezident Rossii" [online], 18 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 II 2022]: <<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67123>>.

- Rossia i Belarus' zaâvili o predotvrašenii perevorota i pokušeniâ na Lukašenko. Ih âkoby planirovali na 9 maâ, "BBC News" [online], 17 IV 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-56770162>>.
- Rumer E., Sokolsky R., *Etched in stone: Russian strategic culture and the future of transatlantic security*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington 2020: <[https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Russian\\_Strategic\\_Culture\\_Rumer\\_Sokolsky.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Russian_Strategic_Culture_Rumer_Sokolsky.pdf)> [accessed: 4 III 2022].
- Russia in the changing international system*, ed. E. P. Dal, E. Ersen, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland 2019.
- Russia's proposal to redraw European security "unacceptable," U.S. says*, "Radio Free Europe. Radio Liberty" [online], 17 XII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.rferl.org/a/nato-russia-security-guarantees/31614168.html>>.
- Sahnin A., *V Belorussii ošiblis' vse*, "Vedomosti" [online], 9 II 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2021/02/08/857158-belorussii-oshiblis>>.
- Sakwa R., *Stasis and change: Russia and the emergence of an anti-hegemonic world order*, [in:] *Russia in the changing international system*, ed. E. P. Dal, E. Ersen, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland 2019.
- Sivickij A., *Belarus': ot donorstva stabil'nosti i bezopasnosti k «eskalacii dlâ deèskalacii». V čem strategičeskij rasčet i prosčet Minska?*, "Belarus Security Blog" [online], 9 IX 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://bsblog.info/belarus-ot-donorstva-stabilnosti-i-bezopasnosti-k-eskalacii-dlya-deeskalacii-v-chem-strategičeskij-rasčet-i-prosčet-minska/>>.
- Socor V., *A Belarusian revolution? What kind? (part one)*, "Eurasia Daily Monitor" 2020, vol. 17, issue 154: <<https://jamestown.org/program/a-belarusian-revolution-what-kind-part-one/>> [accessed: 4 III 2022].
- Sokolov M., *Strana Putina, režim Patruševa*, "Levada-Centr" [online], 12 VII 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.levada.ru/2021/07/13/strana-putina-rezhim-patrusheva/>>.
- Spatkaj L., *"Soûznaâ rešimost'-2022": strategičeskie učenâ ili podgotovka k vtorženiû v Ukrainu?*, "Belarus Security Blog" [online], 2 II 2022 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://bsblog.info/soyuznaya-reshimost-2022-strategičeskie-ucheniya-ili-podgotovka-k-vtorzheniyu-v-ukrainu/>>.
- A speech delivered at the MSC 2007 by the President Vladimir Putin*, [2007]: <[https://is.muni.cz/th/xlghl/DP\\_Fillinger\\_Speeches.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/th/xlghl/DP_Fillinger_Speeches.pdf)> [accessed: 4 III 2022].
- Stat'â Ministra inostrannyh del Rossii S. V. Lavrova "Istoričeskaâ perspektiva vnešnej politiki Rossii", opublikovannaâ v žurnale «Rossiâ v global'noj politike» 3 marta 2016 goda*, "Ministerstvo inostrannyh del Rossijskoj Federacii" [online, accessed: 14 II 2022]: <[https://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391](https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391)>.
- Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America. Sharpening the American military's competitive edge*, U.S. Department of Defense: <<https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>> [accessed: 4 III 2022].

- Sushentsov A., *Russia – a global revisionist?*, “Valdai Discussion Club” [online], 12 VI 2019 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-a-global-revisionist/>>.
- Svetlana Tihanovskaâ – Tuzy, “Èho Moskvyy” [online], 26 X 2021 [accessed: 14 II 2022]: <<https://echo.msk.ru/programs/tuz/2925800-echo/>>.
- Šojgu: popytka smeny vlasti v Belorussii byla predprinâta pri podderžke Zapada, “Zvezda” [online], 27 X 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <[https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/20201027117-r15sR.html?utm\\_source=tvzvezda&utm\\_medium=longpage&utm\\_campaign=longpage&utm\\_term=v1](https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/20201027117-r15sR.html?utm_source=tvzvezda&utm_medium=longpage&utm_campaign=longpage&utm_term=v1)>.
- Šrajbman A., *Budet li Kreml' vmešivat'sâ v belorusskij migracionnyj krizis?*, “Media-Polesye” [online], 8 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://media-polesye.by/news/budet-li-kreml-vmeshivatsya-v-belorusskij-migraczionnyj-krizis/>>.
- Tilly C., *From mobilization to revolution*, Random House, New York 1978.
- “Verim delam, a ne slovam”. Nikolaj Patrušev – o perspektivah dialoga s SŠA, “Argumenty i fakty”, 5 V 2021.
- Vladislav Surkov razvel demokratiû na suverennuû i upravläemuû, “Kommersant”, 29 VI 2006.
- Wiltenburg I., *The importance of understanding Russian strategic culture*, “Atlantisch Perspectief” 2020, vol. 44, No. 1.
- Zaharova M., [Glava MID Britanii Liz Trass zaâvila: «Rossiâ nesët zdes' četkuû otvetstvennost'...], “Telegram” [online], 14 XI 2021 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://t.me/MariaVladimirovnaZakharova/1302>>.
- Zatulin vydal “vzglâd Kremlâ” na protesty v Belorussii, “Moskovskij Komsomolec” [online], 13 VIII 2020 [accessed: 4 III 2022]: <<https://www.mk.ru/politics/2020/08/13/zatulin-vydal-vzglyad-kremlya-na-protesty-v-belorussii.html>>.