

THE ROLE OF BELARUS IN RUSSIA'S CRIMES

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE

U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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THE ROLE OF BELARUS IN RUSSIA'S CRIMES

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE,
U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Thursday, December 5, 2024.

The hearing was held from 2:39 p.m. to 3:59 p.m., Room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Representative Joe Wilson [R-SC], Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Representative Joe Wilson [R-SC], Chairman; Representative Steve Cohen [D-TN], Ranking Member; Dafna Rand, Department of State; Representative Emanuel Cleaver II [D-MO]; Representative Marc Veasey [D-TX].

Other Members Present: Representative Mike Quigley [D-IL]; Representative Andy Harris [R-MD].

Witnesses: Matvei Kupreichyk, Public Representative, BELPOL; Gabrielius Landsbergis, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Lithuania; Kateryna Rashevskaya, Legal Expert, Regional Center for Human Rights.

OPENING STATEMENT OF JOE WILSON, CHAIRMAN, U.S. HOUSE, FROM SOUTH CAROLINA

Chairman WILSON: Good afternoon to all who have joined us. Before we begin, I want to recognize the other members who are here: Congressman Marc A. Veasey of Texas and Congressman Mike Quigley of Illinois. Then I am very grateful that we have Dafna Rand, Assistant Secretary for human rights of the State Department. Then we are particularly fortunate to have, from [Maryland], Congressman Andy Harris. Congressman, thank you for being here.

Today we are here to discuss a country in the middle of Europe often overlooked in the context of war criminal Putin's war in Ukraine: Neighboring Belarus, still controlled by the dictator Alexander Lukashenko. After 30 years, and many false elections, his relationship with war criminal Vladimir Putin is closer than ever. It was Putin who helped him maintain power in the face of the popular mass protest of 2020. Lukashenko is returning the favor by allowing Belarus to be used as a staging ground for attacks on Ukraine and a space to commit other crimes, such as the kidnapping of Ukrainian children, which is inconceivable in the 21st century that something like that could occur. It is actually in the tradition of what Hitler did with the children of Poland, and so, the similarities, sadly, are very clear.

Belarus is now effectively controlled by Putin. Lukashenko traded its sovereignty to protect his own interests. It is essential that we take action and precautions accordingly. This means treating Belarus and Russia the same for sanctions purposes and making sure Russia cannot use Belarus as a loophole to avoid sanctions. Finally, Belarusians have suffered greatly under Lukashenko. I want to acknowledge the bravery and dedication of those fighting for a free and democratic Belarus and sovereignty, and for the release of political prisoners. The actual elected president, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, is courageous in her efforts to promote freedom and democracy. Particularly significant, the country of Lithuania is at the forefront of working to promote freedom and democracy for their next-door neighbor. [Belarusian] patriots are at the forefront of these calls for accountability for Lukashenko, at great risk to themselves, whether still in Belarus or abroad.

I appreciate the ranking member of the Commission, Steve Cohen, for recommending the Helsinki Commission hold this hearing, and for being a constant bipartisan partner in this Congress. He will be here in a few minutes. He has got another schedule issue. The Helsinki Commission functions best when it is bipartisan. The U.S. foreign policy issues should be, as much as we can, bipartisan. Steve and I do not agree on much domestically, but when it comes to foreign policy, we are in agreement that dictators must be deterred, and the United States should support freedom around the world. Thank you, Steve, when he comes.

With that, I want to introduce our witnesses for the day who know very well the dangers of the Russia-Belarus alliance. First, we will hear from Matvei Kupreichyk, who is a public representative for the Belarusian organization BELPOL. I am so grateful to have the acting foreign minister of the great country of—liberated, great country of Lithuania. I mean, who—after decades, back on track? God bless you, and that is Gabrielius Landsbergis. Then we are grateful to have Kateryna Rashevskaya, a legal expert from the Ukrainian organization, Regional Center for Human Rights. Three extraordinary individuals.

If there are any members of the panel who would like to make an opening statement? If not, we will proceed right away. I cannot wait for Congressman Cohen to get here. As we proceed, I would like to, again, thank each of you for coming. We will begin with the honorable Mr. Kupreichyk.

**TESTIMONY OF MATVEI KUPREICHYK, PUBLIC
REPRESENTATIVE, BELPOL**

Mr. KUPREICHYK: Dear Mr. Chairman, members of the audience, thank you for the opportunity to participate in the hearing on Belarus at the U.S. Helsinki Commission. The BELPOL organization is engaged in documenting the crimes of Lukashenko's regime, including political repression, facts of corruption, complicity in the Russian aggression in Ukraine, and others. We closely cooperated with the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Thanks to the documents handed over by the BELPOL organization, the USA, European Union countries, and also democratic states-imposed sanctions on 26 enterprises in Belarus and Russia.

I would like to emphasize that dictator Lukashenko is not the legitimate president of Belarus. In 2020, he lost the election to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, but he falsified the results of the voting and illegally retained power by armed means, with the help of large-scale repressions. Our organization has received documents confirming that the Lukashenko regime has already launched a mechanism of falsification of the so-called Presidential election in Belarus in 2025. BELPOL has prepared a report for the world community on the system of illegal retention of power by Lukashenko's regime, the falsification of previous selection campaigns, and the upcoming so-called Presidential election in 2025.

I am submitting this report to my testimony. Here is our report. If you—when you read that report, if you need the attachments of that, you can write a message to our email, and we will send the attachments to you.

Thank you.

When you—when world politicians talk about Russia's main allies in the war against Ukraine, they name Iran, North Korea, and China. For some reason, they forget about the dictator Lukashenko. Lukashenko's regime is not included in the global axis of evil. In fact, it plays a significant role in it. Without the involvement of dictator Lukashenko, Putin would not have been able to carry out a large-scale invasion of Ukraine. The fighting would have been more localized. Now Lukashenko is trying to play the role of a peacemaker and negotiator, but in reality, he continues to assist in Russian aggression. The BELPOL organization has received many documents confirming that Lukashenko's regime is increasing military supplies to Russia.

The enterprises subordinated to the State Military Industrial Committee of Belarus shipped military goods worth \$422 million to Russia in 2023. In the first eight months of 2024, the same enterprises shipped military goods worth 459 million dollars to Russia. That is more than in the whole of the 2023 year. This is only a part of military supplies from Belarus as exports of military goods to Russia. Also made by enterprises that are not part of the State Military Industrial Committee, including private firms. Here are some more figures. In 2023–2024, Lukashenko's regime supplied Russia with 4.5 million sets of parts for 122-millimeter caliber rockets for Grad MLRS, worth \$260 million. In 2023, about 800 sets of electronic optical units for sights and control systems for tanks and armored vehicles were shipped from Belarus to Russia. In 2024, more than 1,500 such systems have already been shipped. Contracts for the shipment of military goods to the Russian Federation are concluded for 2025 and 2026.

For this reason, we should impose more sanctions against individuals and enterprises that support Russian aggression against Ukraine. One more important piece of information. On December 6, tomorrow, in Minsk, Lukashenko should sign a treaty between Russia and Belarus on security guarantees within the framework of the Union State. Russia concluded a similar treaty with North Korea this year. The organization BELPOL received the text of this treaty. This agreement will allow Russia to place new military bases and military contingents on the territory of Belarus. In addition, Belarusian citizens can be sent to war with Ukraine allegedly

to protect the territorial integrity of Russia. For that reason, we need to know that—we need to do more sanctions, and we need to do faster the sanctions.

Therefore, we cannot trust dictator Lukashenko. We should increase the sanctions pressure on him. According to the information received by the organization BELPOL, international economic sanctions, at present particularly, do not affect the standard of living of ordinary Belarusians. Sanctions have a negative impact on military supplies. Sanctions are breaking up supply chains. Sanctions increase the production time of military products. Sanctions reduce the profitability of its production. Sanctions reduce the output of military goods for Russia. Sanctions make it impossible to purchase and pay for individual companies. However, the Lukashenko regime takes measures to circumvent the sanctions.

For example, information in customs documents is forged. So-called “spacer firms” are created right now. For example, the organization BELPOL found out that the Chinese “spacer firm” Shenzhen 5G High Tech Innovation buys companies for tanks sized for Chinese manufacturers and supplies them to the Belarusian factory Peleng. The firm Shenzhen 5G High Tech Innovation is created and managed by citizens of Belarus who previously worked at Belarusian military plants. That is, Chinese manufacturers formally do not export these military goods to Belarus, but actually do it through the firm Shenzhen 5G High Tech Innovation.

Many people think that the Belarusian people have come to terms with the rule of Lukashenko’s regime, as there are no protests in Belarus now. It is not so. Now protests are impossible because of large-scale repression. In Belarus, people are in prison even for verbal criticism of the regime. Belarusians have not given up. They act underground. They send information about the regime’s crimes to Belarusian democratic organizations. Thanks to the help of ordinary Belarusians, our organization, BELPOL, receives the information and documents, which I mentioned above. We call for increased sanctions pressure on Lukashenko’s criminal regime. BELPOL and other Belarusian democratic organizations will provide the necessary assistance, but at the same time, we need your help in bringing dictator Lukashenko to justice.

Thank you for your attention. I am ready to answer the questions.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Kupreichyk.

We are so grateful to have the acting foreign minister of the extraordinary nation of Lithuania. We are so grateful to have Mr. Landsbergis.

**TESTIMONY OF GABRIELIUS LANDSBERGIS, ACTING
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA**

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: Thank you so much, distinguished chair, distinguished Members of Congress, and dear colleagues. I have a chance to present an overview, a tiny overview, of the activities that we observe taking place in Belarus, and the way that they affect regional security, in view of the war against Ukraine—Russia’s war against Ukraine. I would like to stress that Belarusian aggressive activity did not start in 2022. I would mark that after the stolen election in 2020, when a big part of Belarusian opposition was

forced to flee Belarus and to find refuge either in Lithuania or Poland, this is where the change really began.

I would mark that the first event that really points out the changed behavior of the regime was in 2021 when the civilian air flight traveling from Athens to Vilnius was hijacked in the airspace of Belarus, in order to take two Belarusian opposition members prisoner. There was a false report of a bomb if a plane were to land in Vilnius, so the plane was forced to land in Minsk. It landed. People were apprehended. Then the rest of them were let go. We had a clear act of State terrorism employed against Belarusian people, against Lithuanian people. There were U.S. citizens. There were—you know, half of Europe was represented in that plane.

Afterward, Lukashenko—an illegitimate, as it was said—illegitimate dictator promised that in order to continue to change the policy of Europe, he would employ different hybrid measures. He said that publicly. Out of those measures, he said that now—up until now Belarus was able to stop the flow of migrants to European borders. He said that he will not be able to do that any longer. Quite—you know, not so long time after he made that statement public, we started seeing hundreds of people from Iraq, and Northern Africa, Middle East, arriving at the border of Lithuania. At gunpoint—most of them at the gunpoint, being pushed through the border of my country.

They were told false stories that the country that they are finding there is actually—it could be Germany, it could be Sweden. They were not given maps. They were not given instructions, or anything else. They were just forced through the border. At one point there were more than 20,000 people in Belarus that were flown in from Kurdistan in Iraq into Belarus, selling them tickets and promise of European—you know, passage into Europe, and then pushed to the border of Europe. That was an operation organized with the help of Belarusian intelligence agencies, and police in order to bring those people from the Middle East to the European border. We called it a hybrid attack. We called it a weaponized migration. Therefore, we were forced to defend not just my country but also the European border.

Afterward, most of the events were presented. We know how it went. Belarus facilitated the Russian attack against Ukraine. As colleague just mentioned, definitely the attack could have been quite different if Belarus had not participated in the manner that it did. Later on, after the initial attack, and when it was repelled and was mostly focused in the eastern part of Ukraine—the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, the activities did not cease. Belarus provides a space for Russian troops training. It accepted Russian nuclear weapons. As far as we know, they are stationed in Belarus, actually changing that security situation of the whole—of the whole region. As was mentioned, Belarus is the No. 1 country helping Russia avoid sanctions.

Therefore, it is imperative that we align the sanctions that they—the ones that are imposed on Russia with the ones that are imposed on Belarus. We cannot allow Belarus to be just, you know, one station before everything that is sanctioned being sent further down. I like to stress a couple of additional things. Mr. Chair, you have mentioned the kidnapping of children. We have very specific

information that children from the occupied areas in Ukraine have been sent to Belarusian hospitals, and health centers, for retraining. We gathered the information, and we passed that to the international justice system so that—because the ones that have been targeted by the ICC in Russia, apart from Putin, are the ones who are dealing with the kidnapping of children. Since Belarus is complicit in this crime, we believe that they should be joined in—not just in a political condemnation, but in an actual criminal investigation as to their actions.

Last, I wanted to tell one short story. When there was Wagner activity—and, Chair, you definitely remember when Wagner troops decided to march onto Moscow, and they were stopped. Later on, they were sent to Belarus. Part of them were training and stationed just by the border of my country. Actually, the closest camp where Wagner troops were stationed was just five, seven kilometers away from my border. You know, it was the saddest thing here, because on the other side of the—on our side of the border we have health-care centers which were treated treating Ukrainian soldiers. During the night, or during the day, they would hear Wagner troops training on the other side of the border, because that is so close. They would hear the same people that they—that they had to fight in Ukraine being brought to Lithuania, while they were treated there.

My point is, distinguished Congressman, is that Lithuania is directly affected by the war in Ukraine and by Belarusian activities that happened before the war, during the war, and currently still do take place. Very, very last, Lukashenko, what he does—and that is not the first time—next year he will have what he will call the election, actually reappointment of himself. Usually, he uses this opportunity to reestablish the relationship, you know, with whom-ever he can. I am sure that he will reach out. He will reach out to European countries. He will reach out maybe even to the U.S., wherever, via, you know, back channels. We cannot allow him to be legitimized in that manner. We have to tell them that we will withstand him. Democracies will withstand an authoritarian. We will continue with sanctions. We will continue with pressure.

Thank you so much.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you so much, Foreign Minister Landsbergis. You are very clear in your statements, and so helpful. We are so fortunate to have, indeed, Kateryna Rashevka. We appreciate you being an expert, from the Regional Center for Human Rights.

**TESTIMONY OF KATERYNA RASHEVSKA, LEGAL EXPERT,
REGIONAL CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

Ms. RASHEVSKA: Chairman Wilson, distinguished members of the Helsinki Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Many who support Ukraine understand that Russia has taken more than 90,000 Ukrainian children. There is less public awareness of the role of Belarus in this displacement, indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children too. The Lukashenko regime is teaching Ukrainian children to aspire to die for the country that is committing atrocities against them. This is part and parcel of the

global Russian State policy of eradicating Ukrainian national identities through the level of aggression. Unfortunately, the role of the Belarusian regime in aiding and abetting this policy has not received adequate attention. My testimony draws on a year of research and advocacy work of the Regional Center for Human Rights, Freedom House, and Human Rights Center Viasna, in partnership with independent Belarusian organizations.

We identified 2,219 Ukrainian children between the ages of five and 17 who were taken and then re-educated in 18 institutions in Belarus. Most of these children are orphans, children deprived of parental care, children with disabilities, and those living in difficult conditions. We know that some parents were coerced into giving the so-called consent to get these children to Belarus because they were threatened to be deprived of parental care rights or their property. Other parents who just survived all these atrocities and ongoing war believed that this transfer to Belarus was the only way to save their child's life. None of the parents gave their consent to what occurred inside the reeducation camps.

The curriculum in these institutions just has a strong ideological component featuring Russian and post-Soviet propaganda narratives. Ukrainian children are forbidden to express their national identity, also to speak the Ukrainian language. Their Ukrainian citizenship is just not recognized. Perhaps the most horrific thing these children experienced in Belarus was militarization. Ukrainian children were trained by Belarusian officers who were involved in violent crackdowns on protesters in August 2020. The children also participated in hand-to-hand combat training with representatives of the Belarusian special forces. We now see that some Ukrainian children aspired to enter Russian military schools and to defend their new motherland, Russia.

In 2021, Alexander Lukashenko personally laid the foundation for this scheme as a part of a coordinated policy with the Russian Federation through the Union State. The Union State is a supra-national agreement between two countries that actually serves as a major sanctions loophole to avoid all pressure, and all restrictions, especially on the issue of Ukraine's children. In 2022 and 2023, the Union State allocated over \$300 for the displacement of Ukrainian children in Belarus, which resulted in more than 20 re-education campaigns. This scheme of displacing Ukrainian children goes all the way to the top, including Vladimir Putin, Alexander Lukashenko, as well as Dmitry Mezentsev, the State secretary for the Union State, and Mikhail Mishustin, Russia's prime minister. It also includes directors of educational institutions and also these camps, as well as representatives of Russian and Belarusian GONGO's, and local administrations.

Political indoctrination and militarized reeducation of Ukrainian children in Russia and in Belarus are systematic and widespread, bearing the elements of a separate crime against humanity, under the Rome Statute, discriminatory persecution. This conclusion highlights the gravity of the crimes and underscores the need for a decisive reaction from the United States and from the international community. We need more individual and harmonized sectoral sanctions. In this context, we welcome recent restrictions against five new persons involved in the deportation of Ukrainian

children. We need also the issuance of new arrest warrants against perpetrators from Belarus who were involved in the process to organize all these reeducation campaigns in the territory of Belarus.

We also need the number of children who may be eligible for reparation under any future compensation mechanism to be expanded. We look to the United States as a member of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children to assist other countries, Ukraine, to establish unified legal mechanisms for the repatriation of Ukrainian children. Because, unfortunately, approximately 90 percent of all deported children remain under Russian control. We also need to elaborate on the basis of previous experience of other countries the national system of rehabilitation and reintegration, because these children are really very traumatized. We will fight to return Ukrainian children back to their homes because it is not only their right but a passport to a better future for these children and for Ukraine.

Distinguished members, also Ranking Member Cohen, I am persuaded that if we are to achieve true peace in Ukraine we must begin with our children. Having a country that is truly fit for children does not simply imply the absence of war. It means having a safe country where every child can grow to adulthood in peace, dignity, and safety, without constant threat from neighboring states.

Thank you.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you very much, Ms. Rashevskaya.

We are now going to begin with five minutes by each person who is here on the Commission. We have been joined by the highest Honorable Vice Commissioner Steve Cohen, from Tennessee. I am very grateful. In fact, after my five minutes I am going to turn it over to him. I have a—Steve has arranged that I have a meeting with Elon Musk. I—

Representative COHEN: Going to loan him some money. [LAUGHTER.]

Chairman WILSON: Hey—but, hey, no, but again, thank you, Ms. Rashevskaya. It is just horrifying to think of—and my five minutes begins now. Truly, it was impressive. I was there in Kyiv and met where persons had rescued some children who had been kidnapped. Who would imagine here in the 21st century, as I mentioned, that you would have kidnapping of children for Russification, or whatever they want to call it, in the exact tradition of Adolf Hitler of kidnapping children in Poland to Germanize, Nazify? To have this reliving is just—to me, in the 21st century, should not be. That is why it is so encouraging to have you here today.

Foreign Minister Landsbergis, I am so happy that you are here. Indeed, something so important that you mention, and that is that Lukashenko has announced that he has several dozen Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus. What should—how does that change the dynamics? What should we do?

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: Thanks so much. I mean, probably we have to—at this stage we have to understand that Belarus is an extension of Russia's military arm. When we are thinking about the need to defend NATO's eastern flank from Russia, we have to understand that Russia is way closer than we have imagined. Because it actually operates freely in the whole territory of Belarus.

With its arms, when it comes to Ukraine we have seen, you know, the very fast troop movement.

When we have seen Wagner was back from almost, you know, a couple of hundred kilometers from Moscow. They were on the Lithuanian border in eight hours. That is how fast you can move within Russia and Belarus. The request from us is, to take into account that Belarus is a major security issue for the region. When you—when you talk about the needs of our region, it needs to be reinforced. It needs to be reinforced with more NATO troops, with more equipment, because we are in a dangerous region.

Chairman WILSON: Then, indeed, Foreign Minister, as you indicate, the Russian military in Belarus, that it is really an extension so far. But hey, it also fits into something else. Mr. Putin claims that Ukraine does not exist. As he is trying to recreate the Soviet Union, I wonder if the people in Belarus understand that means one day they will not exist too. As we have already seen with the Russian occupations, continuous, of Transnistria in Moldova and the South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the Republic of Georgia, maintaining troops in Armenia. The people of Belarus should understand that if one former republic does not exist, all ultimately would be the goal not to exist.

With that in mind, again, the kidnapping and Russification of the children is so horrific. Any further comments you would like to make, Ms. Rashevskaya?

Ms. RASHEVSKAYA: Maybe I would like to demonstrate some photos just in order to support what I will tell. This is the militarization of Ukrainian children made by the Russian Federation, with the assistance of Belarusian agents. Ukrainian kids are just turned into the enemies of their proper nation. In order to fulfill this aim, the Russian Federation, together with Belarus, built the whole system just under our noses to raise children as soldiers. They do it through formal and informal education. That is why, for us, it is really important to recognize this indoctrination and militarization of education as a separate crime against humanity. Of course, to punish all guilty persons. Because, you know, this is not only a threat to Ukraine, but to global peace and security because this is a clear sign that Russia, as well as Belarus, they are not planning to stop this war. They are preparing a new war of aggression.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you so much. Indeed, it is the ultimate crime against humanity to kidnap children and deny them their heritage. Mr. Kuprechyk, the—indeed, the foreign minister has mentioned about the Russian military presence in Belarus. What is the extent of the presence there?

Ms. KUPREICHYK: I just wanted to add some information about nuclear weapons in Belarus. BELPOL organization just a few weeks ago published our investigation about nuclear—tactical nuclear weapon in Belarus. Right now, we can say that Lukashenko does not have any nuclear weapons in Belarus. Tomorrow Putin and Lukashenko sign a new document about the Union States. We have information that in the second part of 2025 and the beginning of 2026 Putin will transfer tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus. In a few days, we will publish information about that military base. Putin is preparing Belarus to take a nuclear weapon. Is the first.

The second, that document which Lukashenko and Putin will sign tomorrow gives Putin an opportunity to transfer military bases from Russia to Belarus territory. At the same time, that document gives Putin an opportunity to send Belarusian troops to Ukraine. Right now, we—at the same time, we have information that in Belarus right now Wagner troops—we have just only near 300 of Wagner troops, and that troops are training Belarusian militaries, and that is all, so.

Chairman WILSON: Thank you so much. Indeed, it is prescient on the part of Congressman Cohen. He is the person who wanted to have this hearing. He is ahead of the curve that this is the day before just absurd agreements are reached, or actually, however you want to call it, enforced. I want to, again, thank Congressman Cohen for his leadership. I want to thank all three of you for being here, and I regret I have to run. Boy, are we in good hands with Congressman Steve Cohen.

Thank you.

STATEMENT OF STEVE COHEN, U.S. HOUSE, FROM TENNESSEE

Representative COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Like a politician, you are running. [LAUGHTER.] We do that.

I thank you all for being here. I have visited Belarus on a couple of occasions and met with Lukashenko. He is a man who likes power, and he is not going to give it up. He has no regard for the law. He has regard for his own power and his own brilliant empire, which he wants to have. He knows he is weak, and he knew he was—to be the vassal of Putin. He had no choice but to give in to Putin, because Putin would have taken over Belarus, so he made his deal with the devil.

It is disturbing that he is taken these children. Ms. Rashevskaya, has—the children in Belarus, they were kidnapped by the Russians and then transferred to Belarus, is that correct?

Ms. RASHEVSKAYA: These children, they were displaced. Unfortunately, we are not able to prove that all children were just kidnapped. We have at least three groups of children, orphans, and children deprived of parental care. This is approximately 150 kids who were really kidnapped, who were really abducted because Ukraine is the State who is responsible for these children, who has *parens patriae*, has not given its consent to this transfer. In other cases, it was really difficult to confirm or deny the not coerced nature of this consent, because, unfortunately, most of these kids and their parents, they still are in occupied territories. That is why to contact these people and asked them whether these children were returned, or they were not returned, this is just to put these people under the risk to be persecuted by the Russian Federation.

We are really persuaded that the Belarusian regime is guilty, just because these children were re-educated, just because these children were indoctrinated. Several days ago, the new group of children, orphans from the occupied Donetsk region, this is 38 orphans and children deprived of parental care, they were sent to Belarus. The logistics of this transfer were totally new and unique. First, these children were sent to Moscow, then these children were sent to Minsk, then to Vitebsk. That is why we are not sure that all children will be returned, especially because of their status.

These children are orphans. No one is looking for them. Unfortunately, Belarus, as well as Russia, they do not allow access of any independent monitoring mission to the process of this transfer.

It is really difficult to just give a short answer to your question, but this is a challenge for Ukraine just to identify the logistics of this transfer and also the children who were allegedly kidnapped.

Representative COHEN: They would have come from eastern Ukraine, is that not, correct?

Ms. RASHEVSKA: Yes.

Representative COHEN: Moscow, and Minsk, and then. Are they being trained to be military, to be soldiers? Or just being in the military to be taught to take orders and adapt to being Belarusian?

Ms. RASHEVSKA: This is a difference between Russia and Belarus because while the Russian Federation is trying to make from these children loyal Russian patriots and future soldiers, Belarus is only assisting the Russian Federation to achieve this goal. That is why we did not document cases where, for example, these children were subjected to have Belarusian passports or Belarusian documents, or these children were transferred to Belarusian families for adoption, like it was with Ukrainian children deported to Russia. That is why we should qualify as a crime to Belarusian representatives, because they are not involved in the crime of deportation, but they are involved in the crime against humanity. Their role is a little bit different than the role of Russians, but it still is an international crime.

Representative COHEN: To the best of your knowledge have any of these Ukrainian children been sent into the battlefield on behalf of Russia.

Ms. RASHEVSKA: We documented at least 27 children who were first sent to Belarus, then they were returned, then they were sent to Russia. The plight of these children is unknown. We are not sure that Belarus is not used at some point in order just to organize the process of the final deportation of these children to Russia, for example, to use this time in order to prepare these children to find for them Russian foster families, and so on and so forth. This is also the unique role of this stay in Belarus for these children.

Representative COHEN: Thank you very much.

I am going to yield to Mr. Quigley from Illinois.

STATEMENT OF MIKE QUIGLEY, U.S. HOUSE, FROM ILLINOIS

Representative QUIGLEY: Thank you, Chair.

Could you go just a little deeper dive, sir, into—you talked about Belarus helping Russia evade sanctions. Can you give some examples and details on that?

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: Oh, okay. It is working.

I can give you an example. For at least a couple of years, there was a huge disparity between the sanctions that were imposed on Russia and Belarus. That means that there were goods that you could not export to Russia, but you still could export to Belarus. Lithuania has been actively advocating so that these sanctions would be aligned. One of the reasons why we have advocated, because most of the goods that would go to Belarus go through Lithuania because of our logistical location. You know, the best roads, the best railroads, the best connections go through my country.

That is the—you know, the thing that we got from the Soviet Union.

That we could monitor the goods that cross the border into Belarus, and in certain goods we could monitor that they appear further down. I will leave the report of dual-use goods, of the goods that we would find later that were transferred to Belarus, but we would find them in Russia-produced military equipment, as found in the field in Ukraine. One anecdote is that for a very long time, there was an ability to export luxury cars to Belarus but not to Russia. Most of the modern luxury cars, they do have a GPS installed. That means that whenever the car is turned on for the first time, it sends a location where it is turned on. You would have luxury cars that are being exported to Belarus, to Minsk, but then for the first time, they are turned on, not in Minsk but in Moscow.

Ms. KUPREICHYK: I can just give some examples how Belarus helps Russia to evade the sanctions. Our organization has specialized on that question. Right now, we know that Lukashenko's regime helps Russia to fight against Ukraine totally. More than 84 percent of export of the Ministry of Industry of the Republic of Belarus goes to Russia right now, 84 percent. It is, like, a big number. At the same time, we know that an example, the Belarusian State industrial complex helped to produce Russia some military goods. Like sights for tanks, for mortars, for artillery, and so on.

Lukashenko's regime buys some equipment through China, and after that, they collect the sights and so on. After that, they send it to Russia, and Russia uses it in the battlefield, and so on. At the same time, we know that the European Union's 14th sanctions package works really well. That package gives—because of that package, Lukashenko lost more than one billion just over half of the 2024 year. It is, like, a really good success of the work, and we can show how sanctions work.

Thanks.

STATEMENT OF MARC A. VEASEY, U.S. HOUSE, FROM TEXAS

Representative VEASEY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I wanted to talk with you about Wagner, because we have not heard that much about them in the news lately. Not since the—I am not going to call it the untimely death—but the death of their leader. How would you characterize the activities of Russia's Wagner Group in Belarus today? Do you think that they currently pose any sorts of threats, particularly with everything that is happening in Ukraine right now? Either yes.

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: Go ahead.

Ms. KUPREICHYK: Okay, thanks. Yes, so our organization just collected the data that right now in Belarus we just have not more than 300 troops of Wagner, and that troops are training Belarusian military forces because they have a lot of experience by participating in the Ukrainian war.

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: If I may. After the unsuccessful coup of Wagner, most of the private mercenary, whatever, armies, they were incorporated into the general army structure of Russia because I believe, that there was a fear that, you know, that this could be repeated. You know, the actions of Wagner could be repeated. Certain activities of Wagner, again, under different names but this

same leadership, have retained some activity in in Central African states. This is where we monitor them still actively operating, the same, same people. When it comes to Ukraine, when it comes to Ukraine or Belarus, the picture has changed dramatically.

Probably the main lesson out of the whole situation, of the turmoil, let us call it that way, I think, at least for us and for the security of the region, was the speed of the development of events. Because most of the people in the European theater were caught off guard as to how fast the events were developing. When we talk about the security, and when we say that we have eyes in Russia, when we say that we have eyes in Belarus, and we do, we see movement. Unfortunately, this does not count for stray units. This does not count for immediate action when the decision is being made on point and then the troop movement begins.

It should serve as a lesson as to how fast we can come from a situation which is manageable and not pose a security threat, you know, to NATO, and suddenly does eight hours later. This is—this is the concept, and when we are talking about the increased need of security for the eastern flank, this is the exact reason why. Because the countries are unstable, basically, and they do not necessarily manage the threats to us the way that we think that they might.

Representative VEASEY: How significant do you think it is? I know that one of the Belarus officials announced just in the last few days here that there are going to be some training exercises with Russians in Belarus. How significant—have you heard what that training exercise is? Is it more—is it more posturing, or is it something that we think could turn into something where these troops could actually get involved in Ukraine?

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: Look, I probably, you know, could tell you that the war against Ukraine, it started as a training with 200,000 troops gathered by the northern and eastern parts of Ukraine. It was posed as a training that is a yearly training. We had our share of these trainings. They are called, you know, Zapad, western training exercises. I am not sure actually how much Russia now could devote troops for training exercises because of its military activity, you know, around Ukraine and in Ukraine. Therefore, I would not expect them to be significant. You know, on the other hand, we have to take these things seriously because it is a very easy cover.

Additionally, what I would like to mention is that there is a new actor in Belarus, which cannot, you know, go [overlooked]. It is China. Actually, Lukashenko has been actively inviting Chinese companies, political activity, even military a couple of months back, in Belarus. There is a chance that we are seeing not just an extension of what we talked of as the Russian military area into Belarus, but of Chinese, you know, economic and political and even possibly military in the future interest into the European continent, via Belarus.

Representative VEASEY: Let me ask you this in the last few seconds. What can break Lukashenko away from Russia? Is there anything that can, like, sever that relationship?

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: Well, sir, I can tell you that there is definitely one thing that can break Lukashenko. That is Ukraine's victory in the war.

Representative VEASEY: Thank you.

Representative COHEN: I recognize our State Department representative, Ms. Rand.

STATEMENT OF DAFNA RAND, STATE DEPARTMENT REPRESENTATIVE

Ms. RAND: Thank you very much, and thanks to all three of you for your really moving testimonies. Mr. Foreign Minister, nice to see you again.

I have two quick questions. Both of you mentioned more sanctions. We talked a little bit about sanctions evasion. On the individual sanctions, like the Global Magnitsky sanctions, to get at the individuals who are either involved in the human rights abuses or involved in some of the military activities, can you, all three of you, assess—you know, we have talked a little bit about the delegitimization policies, right, to move these folks outside and to shun them. Is that working, the sort of individually named sanctions, either for human rights abuses or other activities? How are those working? Is it more sanctions we need, or just better strategy around the sanctions? That is the first question.

Ms. RASHEVSKA: I will start with providing you with one good example how sanctions can work. Of course, when we are talking about Putin, Lukashenko, Lvova-Belova and others, so top officials, sanctions are not so efficient because these people just cannot stop the deportation and reeducation of children because this is the State policy. When we are talking about medium representatives, like, for example, mayors of some cities in Belarus who are also involved in the process of organizing these military, patriotic reeducation of Ukrainian children in Belarus, so it works.

In 2023, Regional Center for Human Rights prepared a sanctions proposal for the matter of Novopolotsk. This is the city in Belarus. In this city, there were several groups of Ukrainian children who were not just, like, subjected to some rehabilitation in hospitals, but they were in Belarusian schools. Some of them were sent temporarily to Belarusian families. The mayor of Novopolotsk organized four representatives of foreign countries, also inviting representatives of the European Union to visit Novopolotsk in order to legitimize this policy of reeducation, so we proposed to him. The European Union included him into its sanction list. In 2024 we did not document Ukrainian children in Novopolotsk, so it works.

Also, it works when these sanctions are only the so-called yellow card for these people and other, like, institutions started preparing something against them. For example, we first submitted Svitlana Maiboroda. This is a representative from Mariupol who was involved in the deportation of Ukrainian children. She was included to many sanctions lists, not only in the European Union but also in the United Kingdom and Canada. Then the procedure started, criminal procedures started against her. Now this woman is also not working in the field of sending Ukrainian children, especially orphans and children deprived of parental care, to Russia or to Belarus, so it is efficient.

What do we need? Of course we need more sanctions, not only against individuals but also against organizations. Not like business organizations, but also, for example, military patriotic move-

ments, Yunarmiya, it is already sanctioned in the United States, but we have also other organizations, like the Center “Warrior,” established thanks to Putin and his money. Also, we have another organization, People’s Friendship Academy Akhmat, established thanks to Ramzan Kadyrov. We need also to include these organizations in the sanctions list.

We need to harmonize sanctions between different states because it is just not normal when some people are already included into the sanction list of the European Union, then they have some time in order just to transfer their money to some other jurisdictions to hide them. Then these jurisdictions started the process, announced the process, just to include these people with the same evidence to their sanctions list. We should harmonize. Maybe we need some unified data base in order to do it, maybe some additional agreements. When these processes are not harmonized, they are not so efficient. Unfortunately, people who are really involved in the deportation and other crimes against Ukrainian children, for example, these sanctions are just nothing.

Mr. KUPREICHYK: I just can give some examples of how sanctions really work. Sanctions stopped production of sights for T-90 tanks for more than three months in summer of 2024. I think we can save a lot of lives of Ukrainian troops for that stopping period. Since November 2023, the estimated profitability of some companies produced by State Military Industrial Complex of Belarus fell to five percent. Where we push just some more, we can do, like, zero or minus five percent, and it is not the reason to produce more of that production. The price of BelAZ machinery delivery to any part of the world has increased three times in four years. At the same time, BelAZ holding is the main trough for the dictator Lukashenko, from which he stole more than five billion U.S. for 17 years.

Right now, we sanction BelAZ holding and we need to sanction Trade House BelAZ, which are based in Moscow. After that, we can find stolen money and we can help Belarusian democratic forces to win that game. According to the Belarusian foreign ministry, the amount of losses from the 14th package of the European Union sanctions amounted to about \$2.5 billion U.S. I think it is really good number. For that reason, we need more sanctions, because Lukashenko’s regime is—like, it is not like a democratic State when we need to do a lot of procedures and when we need to do a lot of things to change this thing, or something like that. In Belarus right now, it is an authoritarian State. Lukashenko can just say two words and all the machine works to change the structure, change the scheme on the sanction evasion, and so on. For that reason, we need to provide more sanctions and faster.

Thank you.

Ms. RAND: I am out of time. I just wanted to thank the government of Lithuania for hosting the Belarusian opposition. We have not talked about that, but that is an incredible service you are doing to democracy in Belarus, and if there is anything we can do to help.

Representative COHEN: Thank you.

I would like to recognize the gentleman who represents the second-best barbecue city in America, Kansas City, Mr. Cleaver. [LAUGHTER.]

STATEMENT OF EMANUEL CLEAVER II, U.S. HOUSE, FROM MISSOURI

Representative CLEAVER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You know this is a complex issue, probably not as complex to people who would like to see Lukashenko out of the way. I am having—you know, I mean, you know, Belarus—most of the people in Belarus speak Russian, is that? Yes?

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: There is a process of de-Belarusation. You can call it that. Forced Russian language teaching that basically forces people to abandon their mother tongue.

Representative CLEAVER: Which means they would not be able to join—well, there is probably a number of reasons that they cannot join NATO. Has there been a spirit of—even if it was underground—to connect with and become a member of NATO?

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: If I may, look, there is—any questions of Belarusians joining the transatlantic alliance or European Union are in the future. Today, we can acknowledge a difference in spirit. There are very few countries, you know, with the captured people—and it is a captured people country—where you would see 600,000 people walking out in the street because the election was stolen and asking for dignity and democracy being restored. That very rarely happens. You would see a protest of, you know, tens of thousands, maybe 100,000 is enormous. Belarusians went en masse, 600,000 people, and that has to be acknowledged.

The way that I addressed my parliament, usually when they would ask how can we buildup pressure on Lukashenko and other things, I said: We have to keep the spirit of freedom alive, because it is there. It is repressed. It is horribly, horribly, horribly repressed. There are, what, 1,500, 1,900 political prisoners currently in prisons. That is—you know, that sends a message as how free are you to go out now. Those 600,000 people are still there, and they still believe in democracy. They still believe in their dignity that has been stolen. We have to support that today for any other questions to be answered in the future.

Representative CLEAVER: Thank you. I am also very concerned—I mean, in the old Soviet Union, I am assuming, that it was just simply a part of Russian territory. Now, if Russian—well, I guess it was Belarusian land that Russia used, I guess, prior to the attack into Ukraine. Is there any suggestion, even mildly, that Russian troops are being—or, let us say, Belarusian troops, integrated into Russian units? I mean, Russia has lost—nobody knows the number of troops they have lost. In trying to get a land army, you know, I guess now we are looking at North Korean troops. I am just wondering if there are Belarusians who would have any desire to fight with the Russians.

Mr. KUPREICHYK: Right now we have a military unit in Ukraine, Belarusian democratic military unit in Ukraine, Połk Kalinoŭskaha. Right now—we know we just collected data from the military services of Lukashenko's regime. We know that after war starts in 2022, a lot of Lukashenko's troops changed their mind.

They do not want to participate in that crime war. They do not want to die in Ukraine. They want to do something like connected with the war in Ukraine.

We have a few military units in Belarus which just want to participate in that war. It is like a mobik. It is like the most terrifying unit in Belarus, which tortured a lot of Belarusians. Belarusian OMON, it is like a special militia unit in Belarus, and so on. We know that the mostly Belarusian officers of the army, of the police, like militia in Belarus, do not want to participate in the war in Ukraine. They do not want to go to Ukraine.

Representative CLEAVER: Nor would they want to be a part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization that has been set up?

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: Yes, they are a part of a treaty. They are part of a treaty. As far as we know, and as far as we have been briefed by our services, is that they are resisting, until now successfully, any pressure by Russians to join in active military activity in Ukraine. There have been worries that—at this stage Belarusian troops might join in the activities, especially if Russia, you know, feels pressure. I understand that the Ukrainian military also serves as some sort of deterrent, that currently Belarus is not being attacked by Ukraine. There are no targets that are being, you know, hit in in Belarus.

That message has been sent to Belarusian authorities, that if you would decide to join in together with Russians actively fighting in Ukraine with your troops, your military targets would become targets for Ukrainian weapons. This is probably what works as some sort of deterrent until now. We are not sure whether that will remain so, and therefore Ukrainians and others in the in the region, you know, we have to keep being vigilant with whether that happens.

Representative CLEAVER: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. RASHEVSKA: May I just briefly add to this? Because, unfortunately, the part of this resistance is not to participate actively on the field in Ukraine with armed forces, the part of this resistance is the policy of indoctrination of Ukrainian children by the Belarusian regime. This is, you know, some point where Lukashenko may play, talking to Putin, is that, oh, I am participating in these activities. Ukrainian children are welcomed in Belarus in order to be militarized and reeducated. We are supporting this policy. We are not ready to support you actively by our military troops. Unfortunately, in this case Ukrainian children are just instrumentalized by Lukashenko regime for another time.

Representative CLEAVER: Thank you.

Representative COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Cleaver.

Mr. Landsbergis, you said that if Ukraine wins over Russia, that would be a problem for Lukashenko. Why do you say that?

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: Well, sir, we in Lithuania see war in Ukraine as a zero-sum game. If Ukraine is stronger, if it is able to push Russia out, that means that Russia gets weaker. If it gets weaker, its grasp—geopolitical grasp, political grasp on so many countries in the region, on the captive nations, becomes weaker.

Representative COHEN: I understand that. It becomes weaker. I do not know that if it becomes weaker that Lukashenko gets stronger because he is pretty weak when he capitulates to Putin,

which is what he did. He capitulated without a war, but he saw what would happen, and Putin would have taken over Belarus.

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: Well, sir, he clings on his partnership with Putin. Putin serves him as a geopolitical bodyguard. If Putin is no longer there, you know, too busy solving his own problems, this is where Belarus has a chance. Belarusian people have a chance, and obviously, it is up to them how to realize that chance. You know, I would not name the ways, but I am thinking that they are pretty clear what they can do. Now we are seeing Russia, its military, so closely supporting the regime in Belarus, this is what chokes the freedom out of people.

Representative COHEN: Well, it is a difficult situation—[off mic]—resolution is going to be. I mean, Lukashenko wants to be Lukashenko, and he wants to stay in power. Putin wants to be Peter the Great. That is a whole bigger picture with his ego and life after death and immortality. I do not think Lukashenko thinks of mortality. Lukashenko thinks about today and his grasp on power and wants to keep it. Those are different perspectives, I guess.

Then Ms. Rashevskaya, we know that the children—how do you know that they are orphaned? Did they come from an orphanage, or do they—you just assumed they did?

Ms. RASHEVSKAYA: You know, the most maybe horrific thing that Russians, as well as Belarusians, do, they are not even trying to hide all details about these children. Sometimes we even found in open sources names and surnames of these children. Then we verified their data with Ukrainian data base Children of War. We found that these children were not only orphans or children deprived of parental care but they were looked for as children deported by Russia.

They are just publishing everything because they would like to maybe—to legitimize their actions by this way. Also, of course, they are even identifying the number of boarding schools from which these children were taken, sometimes, like Amvrosiivka Boarding School Number Five. We know all the details. We are persuaded that these children are orphans. Of course, this is information from open sources, but we also had a closed source of information with all relevant data in order to verify our assumptions.

Representative COHEN: Orphaned because their parents died before the war and they were in an orphanage, or the parents died when the Russians invaded?

Ms. RASHEVSKAYA: There are both types. Like, children who were before the large-scale invasion in these boarding institutions, but also there are some children, in particular from Mariupol, who lost their parents. This is the most difficult situation because these children were not previously in the unified data base of Ukraine. Unfortunately, we do not know any personal information about these children, about their blood relatives, and so on, and so forth. That is why it is really difficult to identify these children and also to return them back to Ukraine. One child, one boy from Mariupol, he was first taken to Belarus to this reeducation camp, and then unfortunately he was not returned to the occupied territory. We just do not know his plight. Maybe he was taken to Russia to forcible adoption.

Representative COHEN: Yes. Well, I do not know what the story is, whether these Belarusian authorities want these young people to be Belarusian and be there and have a home in Belarus, or if they want them to be part of the military. If they become part of the military, they very likely could die in battle, and then they would lose them. Whether they are more valuable alive to Belarus as showing the youth and what they have done for them, or if they are more powerful being a part of the military. I do not know what their priority is. Do you have any idea what their priority would be? To send them to battle or would they want to keep them in Belarus to keep them alive?

Ms. RASHEVSKA: As I have already mentioned, these children, they are not detained in Belarus. That is why they are not imposed by Belarusian citizenship. They are not becoming Belarusian citizens and so on and so forth. Of course, we have documented cases where Belarusian representatives, they expressed their will that these children in future will enter Belarusian universities and then will live in Belarus. Unfortunately, some children publicly told the Belarusian media that, oh, maybe in the future we would like to live in Belarus because they were just indoctrinated. They were just brainwashed.

The main goal here is just to assist Russia in achieving this goal to militarize Ukrainian children and to turn them into Russian soldiers, not Belarusians, because, as I have already mentioned and highlighted, that Belarus is not really actively participating in this war with their troops. That is why they are just preparing Ukrainian children for Russian soldiers, in order that Russia in future will use these children as cannon fodder against the proper nation.

Representative COHEN: Yes, that is what—I have read that, that that possibly it would occur, and they are indoctrinating them, and they would be fodder—you know, cannon fodder, and they would go and fight Ukrainians, and that they need—they need bodies.

Ms. RASHEVSKA: Yes, I would also like to highlight that, unfortunately, we already had cases where children from occupied Crimea and Donetsk and Luhansk region, so-called DPR and LPR, it was before the full-scale invasion. These children were also militarized with this Yunarmiya movement. Then the children participated in the “special military operation.” Some children died because they were killed, and other children, they survived. They were demobilized, and now these children, ex-children, Russian soldiers already, they are training Ukrainian children from newly occupied territories.

This is a really dangerous tendency because the Russian Federation is trying to use already brainwashed children from Ukraine against children who are from newly occupied territories, who have this Ukrainian identity. They are just trying to demonstrate that, oh, please join this all-military patriotic movements and military camps. Be like us, because if not you will be bullied. You will be like your brothers as a Ukrainian ex-child, if not—they will do something against you. This is—this use of Ukrainian children, each against each other, this is very dangerous, unfortunately.

Representative COHEN: Thank you.

Mr. Cleaver, do you have anything else? If not any of the three of you all want something else to offer to us? Final closing statement?

Mr. KUPREICHYK: Thanks a lot.

Representative COHEN: Thank you.

Mr. KUPREICHYK: Today we have a really difficult situation because we have a full-scale invasion in the center of Europe. My State, because of Lukashenko, participated in that criminal war. Right now, Belarus people cannot protest on the streets. Belarus people cannot write anything in social media, because in a few days, the policeman comes to the people. Right now, we need to fight against Lukashenko. We are asking on the whole democratic world to help Belarusian democratic forces to fight against the Lukashenko regime. We are asking for help and we are asking for your support. Thanks a lot for your attention. Long live Belarus.

Representative COHEN: Let me ask you this question. I know there are American military forces in eastern Lithuania, kind of north of Vilnius, I think, and right near the Russian border. There is Russian forts just across the way. Are those manned by Belarusians or by Russians these days?

Mr. KUPREICHYK: Right now we do not have any information that Lukashenko's regime placed Belarusian army or Russian troops on the border with Lithuania. At the same time, we know that Putin does not want to stop in Ukraine. Putin prepares for the big battle in 2026–2028. We know that right now Putin's militarized a lot of new plants, and manufacturers in Belarus to produce artillery shells, the rockets for the MLRS Grad, and so on. Right now, we just collecting information about a new plant in Belarus that Chinese engineers are helping to build. That plan should produce more than 10,000 rockets, 122 millimeters, in a month. It is, like, a big number of shells. We know that Putin does not want to stop in Ukraine. For that reason, we need to fight against Lukashenko. For that reason, we need to fight against Putin.

Representative COHEN: Yes, I got you. Thank you. Yes, sir.

Representative CLEAVER: Just following, is there tension—a visible tension—maybe you cannot see tension, you have to feel it. A tension between Poland and Belarus?

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: Well, sir, there is a tension throughout the region. When you have neighbors like Russia or Belarus, there is always tension.

Representative CLEAVER: I know it is a bad neighborhood, but I—

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: You know, but getting into specifics, I probably could mention that there has been a long-standing row between Belarus and Poland when it comes to an imprisoned head of the Polish minority in Belarus. Poland was actively seeking his release out of prison, and possibly out of the country. It was denied, so this is just one of the examples. I mean, when you have nuclear arms placed closer to your border, where there is supposed to be none, it provides tension.

Representative COHEN: Let me ask you one other question. You are the foreign minister. You know about Russian television, which Putin controls, putting the nude pictures of the president-to-be's wife on television. Where is the psychology of that? Is that just to

say, hey, we have got other pictures and be careful, and we will use them? Or is that just—I mean, it is just bizarre. What kind of thinking was behind that, do you think?

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: I think their intention, you know, one has to try to look into the mind of a person, right, because there is a person who is playing some sort of a game. I would assume that it is a game of humiliation.

Representative COHEN: Just to humiliate? Not blackmail, more humiliation.

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: No, I do not think that this would be the case. I think that it is humiliation. This has been done in the past with quite a lot of other people, let us say, who Putin wants to either intimidate or humiliate. It could be, you know, what was previously a Russian opposition, that was a usual Friday evening for them to, you know, to find themselves on national TV, kind of to make a joke or something like that.

Representative COHEN: Yes. It was pretty weird. I think he will never go to Mar-a-Lago?

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: Sorry?

Representative COHEN: Putin, think he has plans to go to Mar-a-Lago? [LAUGHTER.]

Mr. LANDSBERGIS: If I may, sir, you know, my point is—and, you know, coming back to your previous question, I think—when we talked about Lukashenko and what can weaken him, I think we are given a historic chance with what is happening in Ukraine. I hope—I really do hope that we will not miss it. Because we are on a crossroads. It is either we make Ukraine stronger for whatever comes, for the battlefield, for negotiations, but just stronger—way, way stronger than it is now. That solves so many things in the region. That solves NATO's eastern flank. That solves Belarus. That solves Moldova. That solves Romania's election, you know, where Russia is now actively trying to influence them. It solves the South Caucasus, Georgia, and Armenia.

I mean, it basicall—you know, there is a point that connects to so many other points. If we do not solve it, if we do not make Ukraine stronger, we will have to return to this chamber and talk about way bigger problems in Belarus, in Georgia, in Moldova, in Lithuania. You know, who knows where it will stop. I really do hope that those with power will be able to use it.

Representative COHEN: Thank you, sir. I can assure you; you have my support. Ukraine does. I understand your position and it is exactly right. It would be a terrible mistake to go back to just acquiescing to Putin, letting him think he won, and basically letting him win. Then he will not stop there. It will be Estonia, and Lithuania, Latvia. You know, he has got his eyes on Balkan countries as well, and there is no stopping him, and a bad situation.

Thank you all for your testimony and your time. Appreciate you so much. With that, this is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:59 p.m., the hearing ended.]

ADDITIONAL SUBMISSION FOR THE RECORD



REPORT

On Readiness of the Electoral Fraud System in the 2025 Presidential Election in Belarus

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Introduction

The information presented in the report is not exhaustive. The report is prepared by the BELPOL team, based on both open-source information and verified reports from individuals involved in organizing and conducting electoral campaigns in Belarus.

BELPOL representatives have witnessed some events described.

After the presidential election of 1994, all other election campaigns in Belarus were conducted

with gross violations of the law and their results were significantly fraudulent. During the subsequent presidential elections of the Republic of Belarus, the main task for the senior state officials and the 'power bloc' was to ensure another 're-election' of A. Lukashenko, and with a large margin over the opposition candidates.

Election fraud during the presidential race is merely the final stage of the process. Below is an outline of the scheme and methods used by the dictator to maintain power.



SECTION 1. The System of Illegal Retention of Power by dictator A. Lukashenka and Electoral Fraud in the Republic of Belarus

1.1. ELIMINATING POTENTIALLY 'STRONG' OPPONENTS FROM THE ELECTORAL RACE

The key role in eliminating potentially 'strong' rivals from the electoral race, in preventing the Belarusian democratic opposition from putting up a 'single' candidate for presidency (to 'split' its electorate) was assigned to the State Security Committee of Belarus (KGB), other special services and law enforcement agencies.

The KGB maintains an extensive network of informants within Belarusian political structures, non-governmental organizations, and 'independent' media, through which:

- ▶ conflicts between different opposition groups are consistently provoked and maintained;
- ▶ opinions favorable or less dangerous for the regime are formed;
- ▶ the activities of the most radical opponents of the dictator are blocked, while people controlled by the special services are promoted to leading positions in the 'democratic forces' (not necessarily their informants, but rather more 'peaceful' people, as well as those who are subject to official and operational leverage);
- ▶ foreign funding is diverted to an 'unworthy object', etc.

In addition to 'operational games' methods, the regime's security forces conducted intimidation campaigns, including political assassinations, attacks on A. Lukashenka's opponents, and politically motivated criminal prosecutions.

As a result, already at the initial stage the 'high-profile' opponents of the dictator were removed from the 'presidential race', with A. Lukashenka always competing only with opposition politicians of the 'second or third tier' or with people little known to the public.

EXAMPLES:

1999 – Members of the SOBR unit of the Internal Troops of the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs carried out political assassinations of prominent public figures who had previously been part of A. Lukashenka's 'team' but later accused him of usurping power. Among them were former Minister of Internal Affairs, Police Major General Yury Zakharenka, and Viktor Hanchar, who used to be a member of parliament, Deputy Prime Minister, and Chairman of the Central Election Commission. Following these events (and later), many of A. Lukashenka's political opponents either abandoned direct confrontation with him or adopted a less radical stance. Some, fearing for their lives, were forced to flee abroad.

Presidential election of 2001 – The Belarusian democratic opposition failed to agree on a 'single' presidential candidate; more than 10 representatives of the opposition took part in the election campaign, which 'fragmented' the protest electorate and initiative groups for collecting signatures. Among Lukashenka's opponents, the following were registered as presidential candidates: democratic activist, former chairman of the Hrodna Regional



Executive Committee, former MP Siamion Domash (a 'second tier' politician) and a 'moderate' opponent – head of the fully state-controlled Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus Uladzimir Hancharyk. The other opposition contenders failed to collect the 100,000 signatures required for registration as a candidate.

A few days before the vote, the more popular and radical Siamion Domash withdrew his candidacy in favor of

Uladzimir Hancharyk, following which he entirely abandoned politics and got a job as a director of a state enterprise (which is clearly the result of KGB operative work). Uladzimir Hancharyk was not a politician or a charismatic leader. He was a man in retirement age and naturally lost the election to Lukashenka.

Important detail: to discredit V. Hancharyk among the 'moderate' (non-nationally-oriented) portion of the electorate – which at the time constituted the majority of Belarusian voters – Lukashenka-controlled state structures illegally produced and distributed campaign materials purportedly supporting V. Hancharyk. These materials featured the so-called 'nationalist' symbols, specifically the white-

red-white national (but not state) flag. Notably, V. Hancharyk did not use this symbol in his campaign.

Presidential Election of 2006 – the Congress of Belarusian Democratic Forces, which took place in 2005, elected a 'single candidate' – a physics scientist and former deputy chairman of the Hrodna City Executive Committee Aliaksandr Milinkevich. However, he was a regional politician of the 'second tier', non-partisan and was little known to the majority of the electorate before being nominated as a presidential candidate. In addition, other opposition leaders participated in the 2006 election campaign: Aliaksandr Kazulin, former rector of the Belarusian State University, chairman of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada); Zianon Pazniak, chairman of the Conservative Christian Party/Belarusian Popular Front, and others. Upon the results of signature collection, A. Milinkevich and A. Kazulin were registered as presidential candidates. Thus, the description of A. Milinkevich as a 'single opposition candidate' was not quite correct. Even according to independent opinion polls, Milinkevich's rating was significantly lower than Lukashenka's and he eventually lost the election, however, not so dramatically as 'painted' by the Central Election Commission (CEC).



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Important detail: During the presidential campaign, while attempting to participate in the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, presidential candidate A. Kazulin was detained and beaten by representatives of Lukashenka's Security Service and other security agencies. Subsequently, A. Kazulin was sentenced to 5.5 years in prison (pardoned by A. Lukashenka in 2008 under pressure from the United States). Kazulin never returned to 'big politics'. Milinkevich also faced repression for his political activities and was forced to emigrate to Poland.

Presidential election of 2015 – the Belarusian democratic opposition failed to unite around a 'single candidate.' As a result, eight representatives of the opposition were registered as presidential candidates: Ryhor Kostuseu, Aliaksei Mikhalevich, Uladzimir Niakliayeu, Yaraslau Ramanchuk, Vitaly Rymasheuski, Andrei Sannikau, Mikalai Statkevich, and Dzmitry Uss, along with the 'independent candidate' Viktor Tsiarshchanka. This fragmented the democratic electorate into smaller groups.

Important detail: on December 19, 2010, the Election Day, Lukashenko's security forces carried out a violent attack on presidential candidate U. Niakliayeu, leaving him severely beaten. That same day, the KGB, in collaboration with other security agencies and its network of agents, staged a provocation claiming an 'attack by protesters on the Government House'. Inside and around the building, special units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, along with combat and operational groups of the KGB and the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense, had been pre-positioned well in advance. As a result, mass protests were dispersed, and seven presidential candidates faced criminal prosecution.

Presidential election of 2015 – several Belarusian democratic organizations nominated Tatsiana Karatkevich as a 'single candidate'. Karatkevich, however, was a little-known politician with no realistic chance of defeating A. Lukashenka. Later, the BPF Party withdrew its support for her. Anatol Liabezdka, chairman of the United Civic



Party, also attempted to run but managed to gather only about half of the signatures required for registration as a presidential candidate.

Important detail: following the large-scale repressions of 2010, most Belarusian politicians refrained from participating in these elections, either due to being in exile or fearing criminal prosecution. For context, one of the KGB's methods of exerting control over the opposition involves setting up so-called 'red lines' and offering 'friendly advice' on what actions should be avoided.

Presidential election of 2020 – Due to a combination of factors (a decline in living standards, failure to address the COVID-19 pandemic, etc.), A. Lukashenka's ratings dropped significantly, with the majority of voters opposing him. However, despite the unique moment, the 'traditional' Belarusian opposition was unable to put forward a 'single' candidate or even high-profile politicians to challenge the dictator – largely a result of both the operational and repressive activities of the KGB and other security structures.

However, the election campaign took an unanticipated turn. Lukashenka's main rivals were individuals unaffiliated with political organizations: banker Viktor Babaryka, blogger Siarhei Tsikhanouski, and former ally of the dictator and ex-official Valery Tsapkala. To neutralize these formidable competitors and prevent their registration as presidential candidates, Lukashenka's security forces orchestrated criminal charges against them. As a result, Siarhei Tsikhanouski and Viktor Babaryka were arrested and subsequently sentenced to lengthy prison terms, while Valery Tsapkala was forced to flee the country.

Important detail: More than half of the signatures collected in support of Viktor Babaryka and Valery Tsapkala were

arbitrarily invalidated by the Central Election Commission. Fabricated opinions alleging 'forgery of signatures' were provided by members of the State Forensic Examination Committee and other state organizations. At the same time, the CEC validated a higher number of signatures for certain spoiler candidates (Siarhei Cherachan and Hanna Kanapatskaya) than those officially submitted by these candidates – that is, some signatures for the spoiler candidates may have been forged by the regime itself.

Additionally, the basis for denying Viktor Babaryka's registration as a presidential candidate, despite his having collected the required number of signatures, was a letter from the State Control Committee accusing him of forming a criminal group. At that time, the investigation had only just begun, and Viktor Babaryka had not been convicted, making the refusal to register him as a candidate unlawful.

As a result, the CEC registered the following candidates for the presidency: dictator

A. Lukashenka, independent candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (the wife of imprisoned blogger Siarhei Tsikhanouski, she had no public or political experience), and three spoiler candidates who were intended by the security services to siphon off part of the democratic electorate. The regime had planned the elections to follow the 2015 scenario, in which Lukashenka's main opponent was a female candidate, Tatsiana Karatkevich. However, the teams of Viktor Babaryka, Valery Tsapkala, and Siarhei Tsikhanouski (though not the 'traditional' Belarusian opposition) united behind Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, effectively making her the single opposition candidate. This coalition secured her a de facto victory in the election. Nevertheless, the dictator's CEC blatantly falsified the election results, and Lukashenka, through widespread repression and the use of force, unlawfully retained power.

1.2. EXCLUSIVE CONDITIONS ENGINEERED FOR A. LUKASHENKA DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The entire state system in all presidential elections (except 1994) worked in favor of the dictator. He was daily advertised in all state mass media and his speeches were posted without any restrictions. In all the

regions of Belarus, as well as in all units of the army, power structures and in the majority of state organizations special staff meetings were held to campaign in support of A. Lukashenka and to discredit his political



opponents. Opposition candidates had only one opportunity to publish their programs in the state mass media, and they could only hold a few meetings with voters in some regions and make a brief statement on TV. With no independent TV channels and radio stations

in Belarus, few 'opposition' print media before 2020, and the elimination of independent print media after 2020, the dictator's media opportunities during the election campaigns were thousands of times higher than those of his competitors.

1.3. REPRESSION AND ACTION AGAINST OPPOSITION CANDIDATES BY THE KGB AND OTHER SECURITY AGENCIES

During all presidential and parliamentary election campaigns, the KGB, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other law enforcement agencies organize repressions, various provocations and carry out operational and investigative measures against political opponents of A. Lukashenka (infiltrating agents into their circles, controlling all their activities, conducting outdoor surveillance, audio and video recording of negotiations and staff meetings, etc.). The formal basis for such actions is that "opposition candidates, guided or assisted by foreign special services, allegedly intend to seize power in Belarus

by unconstitutional means". There are also illegal arrests of opposition candidates' team members, they are exposed to psychological pressure, dismissed from their jobs, etc. As a result, the majority of the population is not only afraid to help the opposition candidates, but even to attend meetings with their participation and to campaign for them in their communities.

Special services are used to carry out "preventive" arrests of dissenting citizens, who, in the opinion of the initiator (KGB or the regime), could potentially pose a threat



to the campaign. They are detained and isolated on false charges of committing an offense, which are often witnessed only by

security officers (or persons affiliated with them), whose statements are endowed with a “presumption of absolute trust”.

1.4. REGIME’S TOTAL CONTROL OVER ELECTION COMMISSIONS

One of the key elements of Lukashenka’s seizure of power was his illegal dismissal of Viktor Hanchar from the post of chairman of the Central Election Commission in 1996 (according to the Constitution of Belarus, only the parliament had the right to do so) and appointment of his puppet, Lidia Yarmoshyna, who then served as chairman of the CEC for 25 years, until 2021. Then Lukashenka appointed his ardent supporter – Russian-born Ihar Karpenka, former head of the Communist Party of Belarus and ex-Minister of Education – as CEC chairman. All other election commissions (district, oblast, rayon, precinct commissions) are formed in advance by officials appointed by A. Lukashenka – regional, city and district executive committees – at their own discretion.

Evidence of this and analysis of the staff of election commissions will be presented below.

Election commissions were almost exclusively composed of individuals loyal to the regime. All candidates for commission membership were secretly vetted by the KGB’s operational records to assess their involvement in opposition activities – the checks that are not authorized by law. Individuals whom KGB deemed “unreliable” were excluded by the local authorities from membership in the election commissions. In rare instances, for propaganda purposes, a few opposition representatives were allowed into low-level (precinct) election commissions. However, their limited numbers made them incapable of preventing election fraud.

1.5. RESTRICTION OF ELECTION OBSERVERS’ RIGHTS AND OBSTRUCTION OF INTERNATIONAL MONITORS

According to Article 13 of the Electoral Code of Belarus, election observers are prohibited – “to be near the tables for issuing ballot papers, voting booths and ballot boxes”. Therefore, they actually have no opportunity to control the legitimacy of issuing ballot papers to voters and the accuracy of vote counting. This makes the process of falsification much easier. In addition, regime supporters are also present at many polling stations as “observers” and they always declare that no violations were committed in the voting process. They are rewarded with free banquets or other forms of encouragement. Observers from the CIS and other structures loyal to A. Lukashenka always act formally and do not seek to identify violations.

During the 2020 presidential election, the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Belarus, in violation of the country’s Electoral Code, unlawfully barred most independent observers from entering polling stations, citing the COVID-19 pandemic as justification. During the days of early voting, the CEC allowed no more than three observers per polling station, and on Election Day,

no more than five, requiring these observers to pre-register with precinct commissions. As a result, the majority of observers present at polling stations were affiliated with regime-controlled organizations, many of whom appeared only intermittently. Independent observers attempting to access polling stations were arrested by police.

As for the OSCE international observers, the dictator’s officials and special services do their best to counteract their activities.

Upon arrival in Belarus, OSCE observers are often subjected to external surveillance, their negotiations are monitored (also in hotels), and regime informants are put with them as drivers and interpreters. Eventually, their plans and assessments usually become known to Lukashenka’s officials and special services. In order to exclude visible violations of electoral legislation, precinct election commissions are usually warned in advance that OSCE observers are headed in their direction. In the case of fax messages sent by OSCE observers from polling stations, they were copied and transmitted to the regime’s special services.



1.6. METHODOLOGY OF VOTING RESULTS MANIPULATION

In Belarus, responsibility for election results at the regional level lies personally with the heads of “executive bodies” – chairpersons of regional, city, and district executive committees, as well as heads of city district administrations in larger cities, all of whom report directly to dictator Alexander Lukashenka. The falsification of vote count results is orchestrated by the deputy chairs in charge of “social issues” (whose official duties explicitly include “organizing elections and referenda”), in collaboration with the heads of organizational and personnel departments and the departments for ideological work and youth affairs (in regional executive committees), as well as their counterparts in district executive committees. Election commission chairpersons typically act as implementors, lacking genuine independence and merely following the orders of regime officials.

The primary tasks of those engaged in electoral fraud during presidential campaigns are as follows:

- ▶ inflating the number of voters who took part in the voting: for rural areas and

small towns the voter turnout should be 90% or more, in villages it should aim for 100% (this is done to boost the overall turnout rate for the country as a whole, as voter activity is usually lower in large cities (except for the 2020 elections); and

- ▶ inflating the number of votes cast for dictator A. Lukashenka and underreporting the number of votes for his opponents.

In order to accomplish these tasks, election commissions, instructed by regime officials, use a variety of methods to falsify election results. The general scheme of falsification is presented at the meetings in the Central Election Commission, attended by the above-mentioned deputy chairmen for “social issues” of regional, city, and district executive committees.

Next, they instruct the chairmen of election commissions in their regions. Some methods of falsification may differ in different regions of Belarus, and “taking the initiative” is allowed.

To ensure the fraudulent voting results, CEC transfers more ballots to precinct



election commissions than is indicated in the documents. In addition, in a number of regions, under instructions from regime officials, additional ballots are unofficially produced in local printing houses. Thus, the commissions have an opportunity to stuff ballot papers marked in favor of A. Lukashenka into the ballot boxes and withdraw ballot papers with votes for the dictator's opponents. **The ways to falsify the voting results are as follows** (the list is not exhaustive):

1.6.1. One of the key methods is to inflate the voter turnout and the number of votes in favor of A. Lukashenka during early voting

In Belarusian elections, early voting lasts 5 consecutive days before the main Election date. All voters have the right to vote early; no reasons need to be given. **Falsification of voting results during early voting is the easiest, so the regime officials try to ensure maximum voter turnout during this period.** The "official" reports put it at 30% to 50% or more, but the real figures are much lower. Students, employees of state organizations and enterprises, military personnel, employees and civilian personnel of "security" structures are forced to vote early. **During the early voting period, the election results are forged through the following means:**

- ▶ ballot stuffing during voting hours: ballots marked in favor of A. Lukashenka are illegally added to ballot boxes during the working hours of polling stations (during early voting, only a minimal number of commission members (2–3 people) and observers are present at polling stations, making such actions easier to execute);
- ▶ ballot stuffing after polls close: in the evening, after polling stations close, additional ballots for Lukashenka are stuffed into ballot boxes, while ballots marked in favor of opposition candidates are removed.

The stuffed ballots are later processed as if they were cast by voters who, in reality, did not show up at the polling stations. Members of precinct election commissions forge signatures to simulate the receipt of these ballots. **As a result of such manipulations, during early voting, the percentage of votes allegedly cast for dictator Lukashenka, according to "official" reports, reaches 90% or more.**

Note: In Belarus, almost all ballot boxes are non-transparent, so observers and voters cannot visually estimate the number of ballots contained in them. These boxes are sealed by the chairman of a precinct election commission, i.e. they have an opportunity to open the box outside of working hours, replace the ballots, close the box and seal it again. In the case of early voting, at the end of each day, the slot in the ballot box must be sealed with a piece of paper signed by the chairman of the precinct election commission (or his deputy) and another member of the commission. In other words, the chairman and another member of the election commission (his deputy or secretary) can open the slot in the ballot box outside of working hours, throw in ballot papers with votes for A. Lukashenka and seal the slot again. The chairman of the precinct election commission is also responsible for the storage of ballot boxes, ballot papers and election documents. Voting premises are guarded by police officers, but the chairman of the election commission may send a policeman home in the evening to have a break or simply sit him outside the voting room to be able to manipulate the ballots and ballot boxes.

1.6.2. One Person Voting for Multiple Voters

This method is frequently used in rural areas, where "official" statistics claim voter turnout rates of 90% to 100%. In reality, many people in rural areas live marginalized or isolated lives and do not participate in elections. As a result, in villages and small towns, it is common for one family member to visit the polling station and vote on behalf of all their relatives. At the request of election commission members, these individuals typically cast votes for A. Lukashenka. For other no-show voters, it is election commission members or their trusted associates – usually representatives of state institutions – who forge signatures in the ballot receipt registry and "vote" on their behalf.

1.6.3. "Electoral Carousels"

The so-called "electoral carousels" involve the same persons (as a rule, lower-level officials or employees of state structures) traveling to polling stations in an organized manner, illegally receiving ballots and "voting" for Lukashenka. This method is used in large cities (where most voters at polling stations do not know each other) and is applied both during the early and the main election day.



1.6.4. Ballot Stuffing by Election Commission Members During Mobile Voting

According to the Election Code of Belarus, if a voter, due to health or other valid reasons, cannot come to the polling station on election day, he/she has the right to apply in writing or orally to the relevant precinct commission with a request to organize voting at his/her location (usually at his/her place of residence). However, often, in order to increase the turnout, election commissions take their own initiative, without citizens' requests, to visit voters at their places of residence and ask them to vote. At the same time, they use the ballots registered on voters who did not show up to vote to mark them in favor of Lukashenka and stuff them in the mobile ballot boxes.

1.6.5. Election commissions indicating "desired" information on voter turnout and distribution of votes in the final protocols, while ignoring the actual voting results

The most widespread method is the indication of "desired" figures on voter turnout and distribution of votes in the final protocols, ignoring the actual voting results (the number of ballots in the opened ballot boxes and marks in them in support of candidates).

Note: officials of district executive committees and district administrations in big cities provide the precinct election commissions represented by the chairman, his deputy and secretary (the so-called "troika") with specific figures on voter turnout and the percentage of votes for A. Lukashenka and his opponents, which should appear in the final protocol. If the commissions failed to get the "necessary" results relatively "nicely" (by applying the above-mentioned methods of falsification), then the final protocol reflects not the figures obtained by counting the ballots, but the figures communicated by the district officials. The real results of voting are not recorded anywhere at all. **This is facilitated by the method of ballot processing used in Belarus – each member of the election commission counts only "their" part of the ballots, and the obtained result is not announced to the other members of the commission, but is indicated in a note, which is passed to the chairman of the commission.** Then the chairman of

the commission is supposed to summarize the figures in the notes from all members of the commission to receive the total, which is entered into the protocol. Thus, the "ordinary" members of the commission do not know the results of vote counting by their colleagues. The chairman of the election commission is in position to manipulate the figures.

For example, **during the 2020 presidential campaign**, there were numerous instances where commission members observed that the number of ballots cast for Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya appeared visually greater than those for A. Lukashenka. However, the ordinary commission members did not have access to the overall figures for their polling station and signed the final protocol, which reflected the numbers indicated by the commission chair in favor of Lukashenka.

When the final protocols are signed, to conceal evidence of fraud, ballots and election documentation are removed from polling stations under armed police guard on the night following the election. These materials are transported to territorial election commissions, where they are further processed. For instance, during the 2020 election, in Brest, there were documented cases of ballots cast for Tsikhanouskaya being burned even before the establishment of the official election results.

Thus, as a result of the above-mentioned fraudulent methods, no one in Belarus (including A. Lukashenka and the CEC) has reliable information about the actual distribution of electoral votes. During the 2020 presidential election, a number of polling stations ran out of ballots (officially issued to the commissions in excess of the number of voters). There were also cases when in the final protocols of voting results, when adding up all the figures, the number of people who allegedly voted significantly exceeded the number of voters assigned to the polling station. **These situations confirm the facts of ballot box stuffing** (the commissions did not expect a large voter turnout, so they failed to predict the probability of such a development).

It should also be noted that sometimes, by instructions of regime officials, election commissions alter previously forged protocols with voting results in order to "adjust" the election results for a particular region to the required figures. This is caused by the



rivalry between the “leaders” of the regions, competing for who will provide more votes in support of dictator A. Lukashenka. Officials who demonstrated “success” during the election campaigns are rewarded by the dictator, promoted in their careers, get “elected” as parliament members, etc. **The mechanisms for “rewarding” members of election commissions will be discussed below.**

Important detail: Reportedly, due to the above-mentioned actions of the regime (clauses 1.1. – 1.6.), during the presidential

elections of 2001, 2006, 2010 and 2015, A. Lukashenka received more votes than his opponents due to deliberately unequal conditions in relation to other candidates. However, the total voter turnout and the number of votes cast in favor of the dictator were falsified upwards. The actual gap in the votes cast for A. Lukashenka and opposition candidates was significantly smaller than “drawn” by the CEC and lower-level election commissions. **However, this trend was broken in 2020, when the dictator lost the election to S. Tsikhanouskaya.**

1.7. KEY DIFFERENCES IN THE 2025 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS COMPARED TO PREVIOUS CAMPAIGNS

During the 2020 presidential elections and in the subsequent period, the A. Lukashenka regime took unprecedented measures aimed at illegally retaining power, in particular:

- ▶ the “key” presidential contenders were prosecuted on criminal charges and removed from the race at the very beginning of the election campaign;
- ▶ the majority of independent observers, in violation of the norms of the Election Code of Belarus, were not allowed to access polling stations, and many observers were later subjected to reprisals, including dismissal from their jobs;
- ▶ at most polling stations, after the completion of the vote count, the final protocols with the voting results were not posted on the information stands and were not shown to the observers, which directly violates Art. 55 of the Election Code of Belarus. The results in a number of published protocols were subsequently replaced with the figures in favor of A. Lukashenka;
- ▶ dozens of thousands of Belarusian citizens who participated in peaceful protests or criticized the regime online were arrested and detained, beaten and tortured in detention centers, some were killed, many were injured, thousands of them were prosecuted on criminal charges on political grounds;
- ▶ **many thousands of people who signed for the nomination of V. Babaryka, V. Tsapkala and S. Tsikhanouskaya as presidential candidates were repressed in the form of dismissal from work, non-**



extension of labor contracts, prohibition of employment (before 2020 the regime did not monitor and repress such people at all);

- ▶ after 2020, the regime introduced a ban on voters photographing their own filled-out ballot papers, and made voting booths open (previously they were curtained);
- ▶ hundreds of thousands of Belarusian citizens were forced to leave the country due to political repression;
- ▶ **all opposition media outlets, political parties, and civil society organizations (previously known for deploying independent observers to polling stations during past elections) have been dismantled by the regime.**
- ▶ newly introduced amendments to the Constitution now require that presidential candidates must be citizens of Belarus who have “permanently resided in the Republic of Belarus for at least 20 years immediately prior to the election” and “do not have and have never had citizenship of a foreign

state or a residence permit or any other document of a foreign state granting privileges or other advantages.” **These changes effectively exclude most prominent opposition figures from running for president**, as many were forced to leave Belarus temporarily over the past 20 years due to political repression, obtaining residency permits and other documents abroad.

For the first time, the 2025 presidential election in Belarus will have no candidates from the democratic opposition, for the reasons described above. Even if an initiative group for such a candidate were registered, it would be impossible for them to collect the required 100,000 signatures due to widespread intimidation and persecution, including against ordinary voters. **All nominal opponents of A. Lukashenka in the 2025 election are regime-controlled figures**, including former opposition representative Hanna Kanapatskaya. As a result, **in the upcoming election, Belarusian voters will not even have the formal opportunity to vote for a genuine opponent of the dictator.**



For the first time, the 2025 presidential election in Belarus will lack independent observation altogether, unlike the 2020 election, where it was present at least partially. This is due to the regime's repressive measures against observers and the dissolution of opposition political parties and civil society

organizations, which previously delegated independent observers to the polling stations. Moreover, individuals uncontrolled by the regime will be unable to nominate themselves as independent observers through voters' signatures or workplace collectives, due to the pervasive political repression in the country.



SECTION 2.

Violations of Belarusian Law in the Preparation for the 2025 Presidential Election

2.1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Initially, the election was to take place on February 23, 2025. The information that the decision was made on the date of elections was communicated as "CONFIDENTIAL" to the officials of regional and district executive committees.

Besides that, they received a timeline for submitting lists of election commission members.

By 24.07.2024, they had to submit the lists of (11+2) nominees for membership in district and city district election commissions for examination and checkup. Thus, each commission has 11 primary members and 2 alternates.

According to the information received by BELPOL, this is exactly how it was organized. We received several hundred such lists from different districts and regions. The vast majority of the people listed were involved in the biggest fraud of the 2020 and 2024 elections and the 2022 referendum.

By 16.09.2024, it was required to provide proposals on the leadership of the precinct election commissions for the 2025 election, based on the results of the check-up, as well as lists of potential observers. According to confirmed information from reliable sources, this work has been accomplished.

By 01.10.2024 it was required to present the proposals on the full lists of members of precinct election commissions, based on check-ups and weeding out the unreliable ones. This task has also been accomplished successfully.

The content of official meetings, videoconferences, and procedures for

appointing members of election commissions were kept secret from ordinary citizens of the Republic of Belarus. All these events were held under the "FOR OFFICIAL USE" category.

Thus, we observe a violation of the fundamental law of the Republic of Belarus – its Constitution, specifically Article 34, which guarantees citizens the right to receive, store, and disseminate complete, accurate, and timely information about the activities of state bodies and the political life of the country.

Additionally, Article 13 of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Belarus has been grossly violated. This article stipulates that the preparation and conduct of presidential elections in Belarus must be carried out transparently and openly.

Moreover, the Central Election Commission headed by its chairman Karpenka, Ihar Vasilievich, not only fails to fulfill its duty prescribed by Article 33 of the Election Code on oversight of the implementation of the legislation of the Republic of Belarus, but also flouts the Laws of the Republic of Belarus by its actions.

As a result of such actions, the following violations occurred:

According to Article 35 of the Election Code, nomination of commission members is made by political parties, other non-governmental associations, labor collectives, as well as citizens by submitting an application. Such activities have not and cannot have been carried out because the election date has not yet been announced. However, as discussed below, members of the commission have already been appointed without announcing



the election date and without considering the will of the citizens of the Republic of Belarus.

According to Article 37 of the Election Code, the chairperson, deputy chairperson and secretary of a commission are elected from among its members at the first meeting of the respective commission. The first meeting of territorial, district and precinct commissions shall be convened by the bodies that formed the commissions not later than three days from the day of their formation. These meetings could not take place because the date of the elections has not been announced yet.

It will be demonstrated below that contrary to the procedures prescribed by the Election Code and in disregard of the will of the citizens of the Republic of Belarus, officials have already appointed people to the positions of chairpersons, deputy chairpersons and secretaries of election commissions.

In the following sections, the violations will be analyzed in more detail with specific cases to show that the system of falsification of the 2025 elections has by now been created and is ready to be applied.

2.2. THE SYSTEM FOR PROTECTION OF FRAUDSTERS AND INCENTIVES TO COMMIT CRIMES RELATED TO ELECTION FRAUD

During the protests after the 2020 elections, the regime not only failed to punish the forgers, but also took extraordinary actions to cover up the crimes of large-scale fraud in various ways and to protect the forgers. Such actions were accompanied by the abduction of protocols and, at some polling stations, evacuation of members of election commissions with the help of police units, hasty destruction of final voting protocols and complete disregard of complaints and applications of Belarusian citizens to the Central Election Commission and the Prosecutor's Office.

In order to create confidence in the members of the election commissions that they would commit crimes with complete impunity, from the 2022 referendum to the present day, the regime has adopted by-laws at the level of the Central Election Commission that conceal the identities of the members of the election commissions from voters.

In addition to creating a strong belief in its impunity, the regime has begun to create a system of incentives for the commission of crimes of electoral and referendum fraud.



The practice of moral and material incentives for the falsifiers originated before 2020. However, it took on the most massive scale in 2022, and after the elections of 2024 it reached perfection.

After 2022, there was an expansion of the types of incentives for participants in falsifications.

Thus, on May 21, 2022, the CEC Resolution approves the CEC Certificate of Honor and the CEC Chairman's Commendation¹.

On August 22, 2023, the badge of distinction "For personal contribution to the development of the electoral system" is approved (Figure 1).

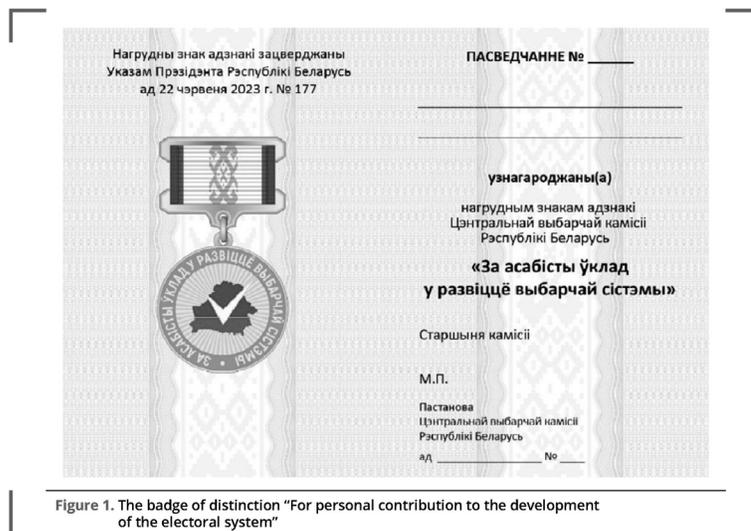


Figure 1. The badge of distinction "For personal contribution to the development of the electoral system"

After the 2024 campaign, the awarding processes became massive and lasted from March to the end of June 2024. With few exceptions, all members of election commissions are rewarded with various kinds of incentives in 2024. The annex provides examples of such incentives.^{2,3,4}

The order of the Chairman of the Homel Regional Executive Committee I. I. Krupko can serve as another example of mass awarding campaign.⁵ In accordance with this document, by a single

decision, the Homel Regional Committee's commendation was extended to **890 people**.

The incentive system is structured into several levels: central, regional, and district.

Incentives from the Central Election Commission (CEC) are granted based on petitions.⁶

An understanding of the incentive system at the regional level can be derived from a document – a list signed by the Head of the Administration

¹ CEC Resolution No 21 of 21.03.2022.

² Extract from the CEC directive No. 26-k of 23.04.2024.

³ Extract from the CEC directive No. 44 of 16.04.2024.

⁴ Petition No 259-GUOKR of 14.03.2024 by Mahiljou regional executive committee.

⁵ Directive No 95r/k of 10.04.2024 by Homel regional executive committee.

⁶ Referral to the Chairman of the Central Election Commission for a commendation to S.L. Akhramovich.



of Kastrychnitski district of Vitebsk, Yury Anatolyevich Panfilau.⁷

It looks like this in descending order of significance of the incentives:

- Certificate of Merit of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus
- Badge of Distinction of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus
- Certificate of Merit of the regional executive committee
- Commendation of the regional executive committee.
- Letter of Gratitude of the regional executive committee.
- Honorary Certificate of the regional council of deputies.
- Certificate of the regional election council.

At the district level, the following types of incentives are applied:

- Certificate of Merit of the district executive committee.

- Commendation of the chairman of the district executive committee.

Receiving a specific type of incentive is accompanied by financial rewards in the form of a certain number of 'base units'. For example, along with a certificate of merit of the district executive committee, the recipient is awarded three 'base units', i.e. 120 BYN. Commendation of the chairperson of the district executive committee 'weighs' two 'base units', i.e. 80 BYN. These financial incentives are designed to complement formal recognition and encourage participation in the electoral process as directed by the regime.^{8,9} The amounts are small, but the vast majority of the commission cohort have low salaries and low social status. These are teachers, small officials, pensioners and other groups. For them, even this amount is an aid to daily survival.

In order to give significance and grandeur to the events recognizing election fraud participants, the awards were presented in a celebratory setting in clubs, palaces, museums and cultural institutions, with the participation of high-ranking officials, such as the Chairman of the Central Election Commission.^{10,11}

2.3. SELECTION OF ELECTION FRAUDSTERS AND PRINCIPLES OF FORMING COMMISSIONS TO ENSURE FALSIFICATION OF ELECTIONS AND REFERENDA

2.3.1. "Troikas"

The following analytics is based on statistics derived from the lists of members of election commissions of **265 polling stations**, received by BELPOL from various territorial units of Belarus. To illustrate the analysis, we provide the list of precinct commissions in the Rechytssa district.¹²

Even though the elections had not yet been announced, the finalization phase of appointing people to positions in election commissions reached its end by early October.

The key element and the direct organizer of fraud at the polling stations are the so-called "TROIKAS". This is a well-established term among the regime's nomenclature, widely used in conversations and even official correspondence of employees of state institutions. The term has been in use since the 2020 elections.

A *troika* consists of:

- ▶ chairperson of the commission;
- ▶ deputy chairperson of the commission;
- ▶ secretary of the commission.

⁷ Referral for rewarding signed by head of Administration of Kastrychnitski district of Vitebsk Yu. A. Panfilau.

⁸ Extract from Decision No 501 of 19.04.2024 of Pastavy district executive committee.

⁹ Extract from Directive No 71 of 19.04.2024 of Pastavy district executive committee.

¹⁰ Directive No 625-GUOKR of 25.06.2024 of Mahilou regional executive committee.

¹¹ Directive No 18-6/16-10 of 28.06.2024 of Vitebsk regional executive committee.

¹² Lists of precinct commissions of the Rechytssa district.

These officials perform the main function of rigging the voting results since they are directly involved in the procedure of reporting them from the polling station they are in charge of. The experience of the 2020 elections shows that the vote counting procedure does not make any difference, as well as the turnout. The swapping of results, regardless of the data in the official protocol, is carried out by the *troikas* at higher levels.

The analysis shows that the regime appoints *troika* members for the 2025 election based on their falsification efforts in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

63% of the *troika*'s membership participated in all the campaigns outlined above, 23% in two of the three, and 11% in one of the three (Figure 2).



Figure 2. TROIKA membership statistics

The chart in Figure 3 indicates that the regime seeks to implement a well-established scheme used in the falsification of the 2024 campaign and involve the same participants in a large-scale crime. 82% of the commission chairs appointed for the 2025 campaign

were also chairs in 2024. Moreover, another 5% were either deputies or secretaries of the 2024 troikas. Overall, the chart suggests that more than 99% of the chairpersons appointed for the 2025 elections were involved in the largest fraud campaigns.



Figure 3. Statistical data on *troika* chairpersons



In reality, even the provided diagram cannot fully capture the depth of the electoral system's collapse. A significant portion of individuals in the referenced category have served as election commission chairpersons throughout almost the entire tenure of Lukashenka's rule. To substantiate this claim, we will share several documents. These documents, written in Belarusian, are referrals for awards issued for participation in the 2024 elections.

The first document features Zhanna Henadzieuna Lipouka¹³, born 27.11.1967. The document is signed by the chair of Verkhniadzvinsk district deputies' council Iryna Frantsauna Kozel.

The document states that Lipouka was chair of the election commission during the following events:

- Presidential elections of 2006, 2010, 2015, 2020.
- Elections to Local Councils of Deputies of 2007, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2024.
- Elections to the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of 2008, 2012, 2016, 2019, 2024.
- Referendum 2022.

Another case is a document featuring Sviatlna Anatolyeuna Karaban, born 10.03.1973.¹⁴ It is signed by the Deputy Head of the Education Department of the Lepel Executive Committee Aksana Mikhailauna Liasun.

The document states that Karaban has been participating in all electoral campaigns as election commission chair since 2019.

In most of the referrals, just like in this document, officials use the wording "WORKING AS CHAIRPERSON OF THE PRECINCT ELECTION COMMISSION IN ALL ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS". These narratives indicate the regime's complete disregard for Article 11 of

the Election Code of the Republic of Belarus, which establishes the full independence of election commissions from state bodies, Article 35 on the procedure for nominating commission representatives, and Article 37 on the operations and the procedure for electing chairpersons, deputy chairpersons, and secretaries.

To prove the systematic nature of such approaches, let us share another document from a different part of the country.

A referral to award Siarhei Leanidavich Akhramovich, born 28.01.1975.¹⁵ The document was signed by the chair of Zhytkavichy district election commission Nadzeya Ivanauna Shabayeva.

According to the document, Akhramovich served as election commission chair during the following electoral events:

- Presidential elections of **2010, 2015, 2020**.
- Elections to Local Councils of Deputies of **2010, 2014, 2018**.
- Elections to the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of **2012, 2016, 2019, 2024**.
- Referendum of **2022**.

The chart in Figure 4 should be assessed in a similar manner.

75% of commissions' deputy chairpersons appointed for elections 2025 served as such in 2024. And just as in the previous case, more than 99% of the deputy chairs participated in the previous three campaigns of electoral and referendum fraud. At the same time, it is worth emphasizing the fact that the remaining 1% of the regime-appointed commissioners who did not take part in 2020, 2022, 2024 electoral frauds were not assessed for participation in the frauds before 2020.

¹³ Referral for awarding Zh.H. Lipouka with the Honorary Certificate of the Vitebsk regional council of deputies.

¹⁴ Referral for rewarding S. A. Karaban with the Honorary Certificate of Vitebsk regional executive committee.

¹⁵ Referral for rewarding S. L. Akhramovich with Commendation of the CEC Chairperson.

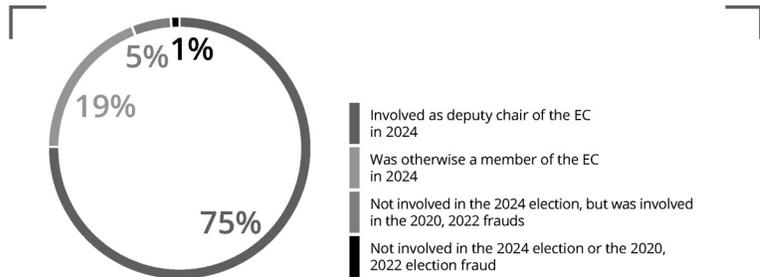


Figure 4. Statistical data on *troika* deputy chairpersons

The chart in Figure 5 demonstrates that 84% of *troika* secretaries appointed for the election of 2025 served in the same role in the elections of 2024. Just as in all previous cases, over 99% of commission secretaries were vetted for involvement in the fraud of 2020, 2022, and 2024.

The correlation of percentages of 82% and 84% between chairmen and secretaries appointed for the 2025 election is logical. It is these people who are of particular importance within the *troika*. A secretary handles fraud by rigging the paperwork, while a chairperson is usually the one with the leverage to influence commission members

and observers. The lists of commission secretaries are kept and reviewed separately. One example is the list of secretaries of precinct election commissions of the Chyhunachny district of Homel.¹⁶

At that, commission members falsify and finalize the final protocol twice. The first time – at the polling station during the vote count, the commission enters the figures into the final protocol guided by the approximate figures provided by higher authorities. The second time, when the final protocol is modified when transferred to a higher authority so that the average figures on all polling stations correspond to the desirable ones.



Figure 5. Statistical data on *troika* secretaries

¹⁶ The list of secretaries of precinct election commissions of the Chyhunachny district of Homel.



2.3.2. Election commission members' dependence on the chairman, or other members of the *Troika*

The appointed chairpersons, their deputies, and commission secretaries are individuals who exert pressure on ordinary commission members. The primary tool of this pressure is employment relationships. In the districts of regional cities and district centers, commissions are typically composed of employees from enterprises where they are subordinate to the chairperson or deputy chairperson of the commission. In other cases, the commission chairperson acts as a representative of the enterprise director, where the ordinary commission member is employed. This individual holds significant influence over a member's future career, financial well-being, and, ultimately, whether their employment contract will be renewed after the elections.

Let us turn once again to the list of precinct commissions of Rechytsa district.¹² Let's have a look at the first twenty-six commissions. These are the commissions of the district center of Rechytsa, Mahiliou region. Seventeen of the 26 commissions are staffed entirely with people who are absolutely dependent on the chairman of their commission. In other words, the commission chair is an employer of all commission members, and their future career and everyday life depends on him.

Commissions 10 and 11 of Rechytsa are a monstrous mockery of democracy and the electoral process. According to the plan, these commissions will be located in one building of the state educational institution "Secondary School No. 11 of Rechytsa". Both commissions are fully staffed by teachers of this school. Furthermore, commission No. 10 is chaired by school principal Alena Aliakseyeuna Brakarenka, who took part in the falsifications of 2010, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2024 elections. Commission No. 11 is chaired by Alena Piatrouna Hlybouskaya, deputy school principal for curriculum work, who took part in falsifications in 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2024 elections.

The situation with Commissions No. 12 and No. 13 in Rechytsa city is similar. The polling stations will be located in the building of the state educational institution "Secondary School No. 7 of Rechytsa". Alena Viktarauna Skvartsova was appointed as the chairperson of Commission No. 13 for the election 2025. Skvartsova took part in election fraud in 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2020, 2022. Just as in the previous case, Skvartsova is the **employer** for all commission members of both precincts.

In accordance with the Labor Code, the school principal is given the authority to hire and fire any of the commission members, as well as to sign a reference on them, impacting an employee's ability to obtain a job elsewhere in the education system of Belarus. In dictatorship, this secures the fulfillment of any instructions of the chairman of the commission at both polling stations, including those of criminal nature.

The chart in Figure 6 shows that 65% of the election commissions in Rechytsa are fully staffed by people who work in the same organization.

Out of 26 commissions in the city of Rechytsa, 24 (**92%**) have a principal – the EMPLOYER – appointed as the commission chairperson.

It should be noted that teachers of schools, gymnasias, boarding schools, and preschool institutions are the most convenient and malleable material for fraud organizers. On the example of the same city of Rechytsa, the percentage of educators of the total number of people appointed to election commissions is **76.8%**.

The system of forming commissions has nothing to do with the will of voters. It is organized as follows. At the first stage, on the instructions of the executive committees, the enterprises territorially located within the area of responsibility of the executive committee form commissions from among the employees of the enterprise. The following procedures are used to coerce employees to participate in the work of the election commission. They start with persuasions and messages about material benefits and end with threats and blackmail.

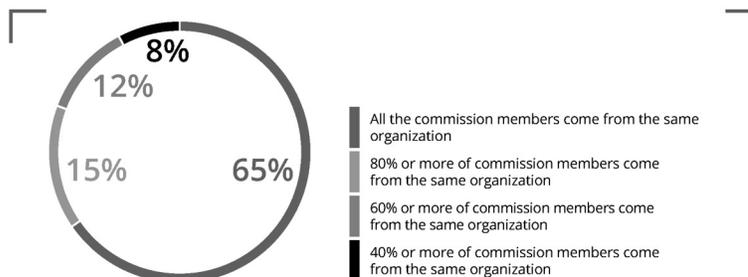


Figure 6. Dependence of commission members on the troika

At the second stage, the appearance is created that people working at the same enterprise and connected by labor relations got into the commission by nomination from political parties, other public associations, labor collectives of organizations, as well as citizens by submitting an application. In other words, at the second stage the fictitious nomination of people to the commissions is formalized. Similarly, the protocol on the election of the already appointed chairperson, deputy chairperson and secretary of the commission is drawn up fictitiously.

As a rule, observers are appointed from among the employees of the same enterprise. A senior observer is appointed among the observers, who reports to the chairman of the commission.

In turn, the commission chair, who is responsible for the certification of observers, creates obstacles and seeks to prevent the certification of independent observers.

2.3.3. Ordinary members of election commissions

Figure 7 presents statistics on rank-and-file commission members appointed for the 2025 elections. The charts show that 44% of appointed commissioners have been involved in large-scale fraud three times in a row in the last three election campaigns. In the aggregate, 84% of members went through the 2020, 2022, and 2024 fraud efforts. Most of the remaining 16% have experience in election campaigns prior to 2020.



Figure 7. Statistical data on ordinary members of election commissions



Even ordinary members of the commission are selected with great attention. Only people absolutely loyal to the regime are selected to be members of the commission. To prove this, it is enough to refer to the set of documents¹⁷ by the Brest Executive Committee to award Maksim Ivanovich Kholod, born on 17.07.1996, and Tamara Ivanauna Zhlukta, born on 04.03.1993. Their profiles both contain the following wording: “No negative attitude towards

state and public institutions, or the constitutional system. No anti-state manifestations observed at the workplace. No evidence of any actions against the order of governance and public safety.”

The chart in Figure 8 is built on the basis of data on ordinary commission members. The chart shows that the regime's relies on vetted participants in the 2024 campaign – 71%.

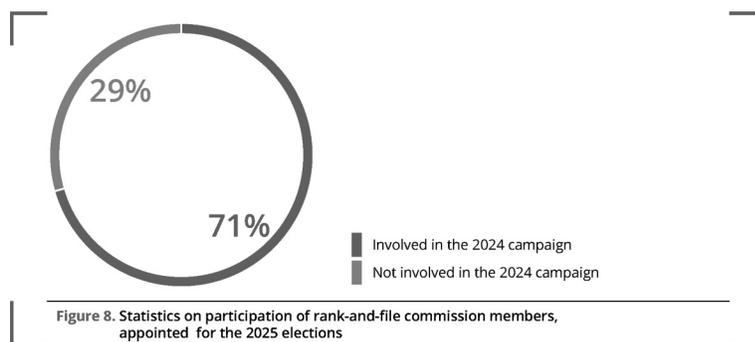


Figure 8. Statistics on participation of rank-and-file commission members, appointed for the 2025 elections

2.3.4. Appointment of election observers

In violation of the legislation of the Republic of Belarus, observers had been appointed even before the decision on the date of elections was made. Until September 16, the lists of observers were sent to the district and regional executive committees. This is proved by a set of documents signed by the deputy chairman of the Shkloou district executive committee Iryna Anatolyeuna Rainchik.¹⁸ It follows from the documents that the order to submit lists of observers was received by the Shkloou district executive committee from the main department of ideological work and youth affairs of the Mahiliou regional executive committee on August 27, 2024 and had the stamp “FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY”. This document is evidence of gross violation of the law – Article 13 of the Electoral Code, which declares publicity in the preparation and conduct of elections. In response to the instruction on September 9, 2024, the Shkloou District Executive Committee

appointed 174 observers for the elections of 2025, in absolute disregard of the will and opinion of the citizens of Belarus.

Full controllability and subordination of observers, built in the system of falsification is proved by the award referral signed by the First Deputy Chairman – Head of the Department of Agriculture and Food Yauhen Yuryevich Antonenkau.¹⁹ Position 9 lists Volha Ivanauna Mishchanka, chair of the Rosson District Association of Trade Unions. She is listed as a “COORDINATOR OF OBSERVERS” in the 2024 election.

Thus, observers are subject to and follow the instructions not only of commission chairpersons, but also of supervisors appointed by bodies of state administration or pro-governmental organizations.

Another documentary evidence of the appointment of observers for the 2025

¹⁷ Petition for awarding M.I. Kholod and T.I. Zhlukta.

¹⁸ Letter 7-33/3434 of 09.09.2024 by Shkloou district executive committee.

¹⁹ Petition for reward No. 04-53/41 of 15.03.2024.



elections is the Cover Letter²⁰ sent to the Main Department of Ideological Work and Youth Affairs of the Mahiliou Regional Executive Committee from the Mstislavl District Executive Committee. The letter is supplemented with a list of appointed observers numbering 189 people²¹. It is dated October 7, 2024, two weeks before the decision of the Central Election Commission on the date of the elections. In addition, it follows from the letter that the order to appoint observers was sent by the Main Department of Ideological Work and Youth Affairs of Mahiliou Regional Executive Committee in August 2024. The date 27.08.2024 and the number of the ordinance 1-9/1852GUIRIDM are indicated.

The third evidence of the appointment of observers long before the announcement of the election date are the “electoral profiles” of the districts.

For example, on October 14, 2024 the Khotimsk District Executive Committee sent the “electoral profile of the Khotimsk district”²² to the Main Department of Ideological Work and Youth Affairs of the Mahiliou Regional Executive Committee, the preamble of which speaks of 108 planned observers, which is impossible in a democratic procedure, due to the unpredictability of such things. BELPOL has at its disposal more than a dozen such profiles for different districts of the Republic.

2.4. TRAINING OF FRAUDSTERS

On September 7, 2024, the chairperson of the Central Election Commission, Ihar Karpenka, stated:

“We have initiated this training on a systemic basis through the Academy of Public Administration. We are moving towards localized training in the regions. Specifically, we are establishing relevant courses at institutes for education development, including in Homel,

for individuals who will potentially work in commissions tomorrow – territorial, district, and precinct ones. These are the people who will implement the electoral process in practice.” This statement accurately reflects the current state of affairs.

A large-scale “training” of the backbone of the falsification apparatus is being carried out in the country. The main task is to provide

²⁰ Cover Letter to the Main Department of Ideological Work and Youth Affairs of the Mahiliou Regional Executive Committee from the Mstislavl District Executive Committee.

²¹ List of appointed observers numbering 189 persons

²² Information Letter to the Main Department of Ideological Work and Youth Affairs of the Mahiliou Regional Executive Committee.



those appointed to positions in the election commissions of 2025 with documents on completion of training. In this case, two goals are pursued. The first one is propaganda pumping of commission members. The second is to create an additional obstacle to the penetration of people not controlled by the regime into the election commissions. It is highly likely that a new CEC resolution will be issued, which will give an unspoken "recommendation" to only appoint people who have been trained and have the appropriate documents to commission positions²³.

Training under the specially developed program "Theory and practice of the electoral process in the Republic of Belarus" is conducted by the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Belarus²⁴, as well as by regional state educational institutions. For example, the training is conducted by the Brest Regional Institute of Education Development. The course lasts for one week. One training group consists of 25 people²⁵.

Training is also conducted by State institution of supplementary adult education "Vitebsk regional institute of education development",²⁶ and State educational institution "Hemel Regional Institute of Education Development".²⁷

In addition, thematic seminars and courses are organized. At the same time, the information provided to the trainees is hidden from ordinary

citizens. For example, there is a Program²⁸ of the national seminar-conference on topical issues of organizing the conduct of elections. According to the current Constitution and legislation, an event of this level and its results should be covered in the media, however, from the program we see that in order to prevent information leakage, the phones of the participants of the event were placed in special boxes for storage.

On November 9, 2023, the Central Election Commission issued Resolution No. 22 "On methodological guidance of the work on training and professional development". This resolution instructed the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Belarus to ensure the maintenance of the general register of persons trained under the program "Theory and Practice of the Electoral Process in the Republic of Belarus". As of June 24, 2024, **2 888** trainees who completed the training were registered in the distance learning system of the Academy of Public Administration.

The list of officials on the register is systematically monitored by systematic review. In case a person leaves the sphere of influence of the state apparatus, the person is excluded from the register.²⁹

For professional and personal assessment of personnel appointed to election commissions, a testing program kit was created and put into operation by CEC Resolution No. 54.³⁰

2.5. LOYALTY CHECKS

The KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs play a key role in the vetting and clearance of election commission members.

Below we quote an internal document of the Mahiliou Regional Executive Committee. At the request of the source of information and to ensure their safety, the document cannot be shown in its original form and is presented in the form of quotations. The document

was sent from the Deputy Head of the Main Department of Organizational and Personnel Work of the Mahiliou Regional Executive Committee – Head of the Department of Organizational Support of Work with Local Governance and Self-governance Bodies – Aliaksei Laurenionak to the First Deputy Head of the Main Department – Tatsiana Antonava. The document refers to the referendum of 2022.

²³ Certificate of advanced training on "Theory and Practice of the Electoral Code in the Republic of Belarus".

²⁴ Letter 01-2/3792 of 28.08.2024.

²⁵ Letter 03/41 of 04.06.2024.

²⁶ Letter 79-5/16 of 11.09.2024.

²⁷ Protocol of Orders of the Homel Regional Executive Committee of 13.06.2024

²⁸ Program of the national seminar-conference on topical issues of organizing the conduct of elections.

²⁹ Letter on the review of the register of 08.07.2024.

³⁰ Central Election Commission Resolution No. 54 of 06.05.2024.



"At the moment the following preparatory work has been carried out:

Preliminary lists of potential members of the regional, 25 district referendum commissions have been identified and formed, all of them to the maximum of 13 persons. The mentioned individuals were verified through the structures of the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. (the number of members of the regional commission is 13; overall number of members of district commissions is 325).

Preliminary lists of full composition of potential members of 708 precinct referendum commissions were compiled and formed. These individuals were verified through KGB and Ministry of Internal Affairs structures. (the total number of members of precinct commissions is about 8 000).

The preliminary composition of potential observers (at least 5 persons) to each of 708 precinct commissions and polling stations was prepared. These individuals were verified through the structures of the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The locations of 708 election commissions have been determined and the final issues of their material and technical support are being finalized.

Local executive and administrative bodies continue to review the lists of citizens who have the right to participate in the referendum".

2.6. PREPARATION OF SECURITY AGENCIES, INTIMIDATION OF VOTERS AND CONCEALMENT OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE CRIME OF ELECTION FRAUD

The CEC, headed by Mr. Karpenka, began mobilizing the security agencies almost immediately after the completion of the procedure for awarding the fraudsters. Meetings with top officials of the security agencies and the ideological apparatus of these agencies are held on a regular basis.^{31,32} This mobilization is being conducted in two areas. The first area is organizing polling stations on the territory of military units. The second one is to ensure Lukashenka's re-election for the next presidential term.

On October 2, 2024, CEC Chairman Karpenka had a meeting at the military unit 5448 MAYAKOUKA with officers of the main department of the Command of the Internal Troops.

About 2,000 servicemen from all formations and military units of the internal troops were connected to the session via videoconference.

A year ago, on October 17, 2023, Karpenka carried out the exact same activities with divisions and units of the Internal Troops before the Single Voting Day for the elections on February 25, 2024.

The purpose of Karpenka's visit is to provide instruction and guidance to ensure full protection of the election fraud process.

As the election date approaches, voter intimidation actions identical to those conducted before the Single Voting Day in 2024 are planned. The aim of these actions would be to prevent the leakage of any information compromising the fraud system. The key method of operation is to impose the fear of being arrested at the slightest deviation from the line of behavior enforced by the dictatorship.

³¹ List of participants of the meeting with the Central Election Commission of 09.07.2024.

³² List of participants of the meeting with the Central Election Commission of 16.08.2024.



One of the bodies that belongs to the security sector and makes a significant contribution to the protection of the existing system of fraud is the Operational and Analytical Center under the President of the Republic of Belarus (OAC). A major point of the 2020 elections was that the regime was not prepared for the large-scale

leakage of evidence of election fraud crimes into the public domain. Over the next four years, the regime managed to shut down all channels of information leakage and to create a system to counter any uncontrolled attempt to publish information about the process of preparation for the elections and the process itself.





Thus, in September 2024, the National Cybersecurity and Cyber Incident Response Center issued and distributed³³ Recommendations³⁴ to all government agencies and organizations. The reason for preparing such a document is stated in the cover letter – “in order to prepare for the election campaign.”

The measures described in the recommendation pursue several objectives.

The first objective is the complete and total concealment of the crime of fraud being prepared and committed at all levels of governance and self-governance bodies.

The second is to restrict the right guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus **to receive** full reliable and timely information about the activities of state bodies, public associations, political, economic, cultural and international life.

The third is the restriction of the right of citizens of the Republic of Belarus, guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, **to keep and disseminate** full reliable and timely information about the activities of state bodies, public associations, political, economic, cultural and international life.

Currently, any information about the regime poses a significant threat to it.

Thus, the mailing list of the Recommendations³⁵ issued by the OAC includes such state bodies and organizations as, for example:

- Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus.
- Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus.
- Ministry of Health Care of the Republic of Belarus.
- Ministry of Architecture and Construction of the Republic of Belarus.
- The Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus and others.

Obviously, the lists include such organizations, whose work should be as open and transparent as possible.

All the work of bodies of state administration is aimed at blocking the release of any negative information about the regime in the public domain.

³³ Letter on forwarding recommendations to state bodies. Incoming 01-11/4285 of 17.09.2024.

³⁴ Recommendations to state bodies and other organizations (including owners of critical objects of informatization) on the implementation of mandatory legal requirements in the field of technical and cryptographic protection of information and cybersecurity.

³⁵ Recommendations to state bodies and other organizations.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The regime barred all democratic candidates from running in Belarus's 2025 presidential election; The nominal "opponents" of A. Lukashenka are entirely controlled by the dictator, effectively depriving the citizens of Belarus of their right to genuinely choose the country's president.
2. This electoral campaign is already marked by blatant violations of Belarusian law. With political repression silencing independent observation, the election results are set to be falsified.
3. Widespread criminal falsifications involve officials and state employees at every level. A. Lukashenka and his inner circle personally oversee, shield, and incentivize these actions.
4. The 2025 presidential election falsification system mirrors the vote-rigging tactics employed during the 2024 "Single Voting Day." The framework for fraud was activated well before the election date was officially announced.



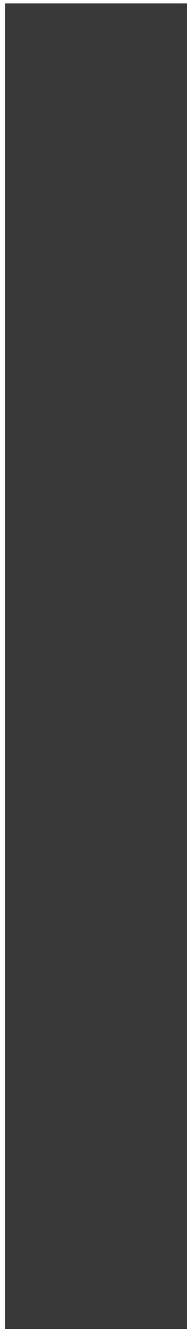
REPORT
ON READINESS OF THE ELECTORAL FRAUD
SYSTEM IN THE 2025 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
IN BELARUS





October 2024

Stolen Childhood: How the Belarusian Regime is Erasing Ukrainian Children’s Identity through Displacement, Re-education, and Militarization



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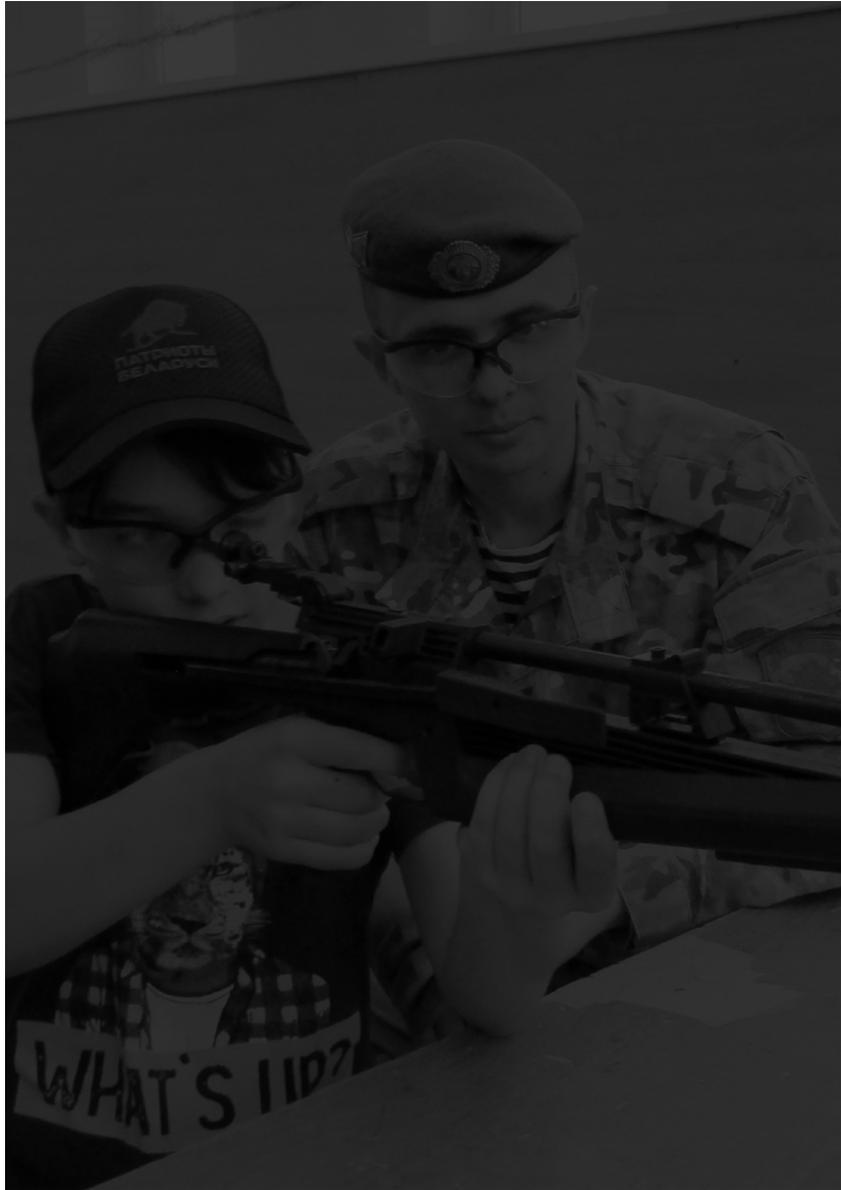
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The cover photo: Children from the occupied regions of Donetsk with Unit 3214 of the Interior Ministry's military unit in Minsk, Belarus.
Date: June 2022 | Source: Confidential data transfer from BELPOL

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Executive Summary

Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian military invasion in February 2022, Russian authorities have intensified their policy of displacing Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. However, the role of the Belarusian regime in aiding and abetting this policy has not received adequate attention. This report seeks to address this oversight by detailing how the Belarusian regime displaces, indoctrinates, reeducates, and militarizes Ukrainian children in the service of the broader Russian state policy of eradicating Ukrainian national and cultural identity.

The report's key findings are that:

1. Aleksandr Lukashenko personally laid the foundation for the displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarusian territory.¹
2. The Belarusian regime is actively implementing the Russian state policy of destroying Ukrainian identity through systematic indoctrination and reeducation of children.
3. The Belarusian regime is complicit in the Russian militarization of Ukrainian children.
4. The Union State of Russia and Belarus plays a critical role in financing and organizing the displacement, indoctrination, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children.
5. Government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs) play an essential role in the Belarusian regime's implementation of Russian policy.
6. The Belarusian and Russian regimes are exploiting Ukrainian children for propaganda purposes.

The report exhorts foreign governments, the Ukrainian government, the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, international donors, and civil society to:

- Call on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to launch an investigation into the displacement, indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children by the Belarusian regime, and to issue arrest warrants for
 - Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko;
 - the secretary of state of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, Russian politician Dmitry Mezentsev;
 - the Union State's Council of Ministers chair, Russian prime minister Mikhail Mishustin; and
 - Aliaksei Talai, the Belarusian paralympic athlete and head of the Aliaksei Talai Foundation, which has been central to the project of displacing Ukrainian children to Belarus.
- Work together to create a single international mechanism to facilitate the return of Ukrainian children to Ukraine from Belarusian territory.
- Advocate for and adopt sanctions against officials of the Belarusian regime and Union State of Russia and Belarus specifically in response to their crimes against Ukrainian children.

The report will be accompanied by a submission to the ICC calling for the issue of arrest warrants for the four above-mentioned individuals.

Note on key abbreviations and terminology

The authors use the following recurring abbreviations:

- “Russia” for “Russian Federation”
- “Crimea” for the “Autonomous Republic of Crimea”
- “Belarus” for the “Republic of Belarus”
- “Union State” for the “Union State of Russia and Belarus”

The authors use the terms “indoctrination” and “re-education” interchangeably throughout the report.

The authors use the following key terms, defining them as follows:

- **Displacement:** According to Rule 129 of the Customary International Humanitarian Law “displacement” refers to the removal of civilians for reasons related to an armed conflict, whether within or outside the bounds of national territory.⁷ Footnote 13 in the Elements of Crimes of the International Criminal Court indicates that the terms “forcibly displaced” and “forcibly deported or transferred” are interchangeable. Freedom House, Human Rights Centre ZMINA, the Regional Center for Human Rights (RCHR), and Viasna deliberately use the word “displacement” rather than “deportation” or “transfer” as the latter two crimes require higher thresholds of evidence and definitive proof of the nonconsensual nature of the process. The term “displacement” allows for the numerous gray areas regarding consent. As elucidated in the body of the report, the provision and/or validity of parental or guardian consent in the removal of Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories is often difficult to establish. The use of “displacement” rather than “deportation” or “transfer” also contributes

to the authors’ emphasis on what happens to Ukrainian children once in Belarus, as opposed to the legality of their movement in and of itself.

- **GONGOs:** “Government-organized nongovernmental organizations.” This seemingly paradoxical term denotes organizations created or sponsored by governments to promote their interests and bolster their legitimacy domestically and internationally. They are designed to look like real nongovernmental organizations but remain under the ultimate control of the government.
- **Russkiy Mir (“Russian World”):** This concept refers to a colonial ideology, supported by Russian president Vladimir Putin and embedded in Soviet and later Russian state policy, of Russian dominance based on a view that Ukrainians, Belarusians, and some other ethnic groups in the region are themselves Russian regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, or how they identify themselves. The Kremlin bases this concept on Russian as a common language, and Russian culture as a common culture and superior to others. The concept also refers to Russian economic dominance over these independent states.
- **The Union State of Russia and Belarus (Union State):** Established in 1999 by Lukashenko and former Russian president Boris Yeltsin, the Union State is a supranational body consisting of Russia and Belarus. Its official purpose is to deepen economic and defense cooperation between the two countries, and, ultimately, unify them. It is governed by a Supreme State Council, headed by Lukashenko since 2000. Currently, its secretary of state is Russian politician Dmitry Mezentsev, and the chairman of its Council of Ministers is Russian prime minister Mikhail Mishustin.

Introduction

Since the beginning of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Federation has intensified its state policy of forcibly displacing Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. Russia began this practice in 2014 after the illegal annexation and occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.³

The forcible displacement of Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories to Russia is part of the Kremlin's policy of eradicating Ukrainian national and cultural identity.⁴ However, the role of the Belarusian regime and of the Union State of Russia and Belarus in aiding and abetting this policy on Belarusian territory has not received adequate attention. With this report, Freedom House, Human Rights Centre ZMINA, the Regional Center for Human Rights (RCHR), Viasna, and the Association of Former Law Enforcement Officials in Belarus (BELPOL) seek to bring to light the complicity of the Belarusian regime and Union State's top leadership. Drawing on hundreds of open-source materials and a significant quantity of data acquired by BELPOL and shared exclusively with Freedom House, the authors conclude that these entities are actively involved in implementing Russia's policy of erasure through the systematic displacement, indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children on Belarusian territory. While these actions take place on Belarusian territory, they benefit current Russian state policy by instilling Russian propaganda narratives.

The findings are the result of eight months of extensive research using open- and closed-source materials conducted by Ukrainian and independent Belarusian civil society organizations, coordinated by Freedom House. While there have been several investigations into the displacement of Ukrainian children, this report is the first to result from structured cooperation between Ukrainian civil society organizations (CSOs) and independent exiled Belarusian CSOs. This cooperation is crucial for developing a truly holistic understanding of the Belarusian regime's complicity and its impact on the Ukrainian children. This report is also the first to draw upon data regarding the identities of displaced Ukrainian children leaked to BELPOL by its contacts within the Belarusian regime.

The report is among the first to trace the itineraries of displaced children and describe in detail what happened

to them during their displacement. Establishing these itineraries is crucial for developing a detailed understanding of the Belarusian regime's involvement. While the authors were able to determine the names of some children, identifying all those affected requires further research. The occupying authorities in Ukraine, the Belarusian regime, the Union State, and the government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs) acting on these entities' behalf deliberately conceal information that would allow for the identification of children.

The report's findings represent a breakthrough in our understanding of the impact of displacement on Ukrainian children, and how this policy of displacement is connected to other crimes the Russian and the Belarusian regimes are committing against Ukrainians. The treatment of Ukrainian children during their displacement, including their indoctrination and militarization, constitutes evidence for the crime of persecution on discriminatory grounds as defined in the Rome Statute of the ICC given the clear aim of eradicating Ukrainian national identity.

The report contains four chapters. Chapter One provides a brief chronology, illustrating how the displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarus changed after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Chapter Two details how the Belarusian regime is implementing Russia's system of indoctrination, reeducation, and militarization. Chapter Three uncovers the actors responsible for the financing and organization of the Belarusian regime's displacement and indoctrination of Ukrainian children. Chapter Four describes the legal conclusions of the report's findings, including the international crimes committed. The report concludes by calling on the ICC to issue arrest warrants for Aleksandr Lukashenko, Dmitry Mezentsev, Mikhail Mishustin, and Aliaksei Talai. It also provides recommendations for foreign governments, the government of Ukraine, international donors, civil society, and the ICC on ways to hold Belarusian and Russian authorities accountable.

The report is accompanied by a submission to the ICC by Freedom House, RCHR, and ZMINA, calling on the body to launch an investigation into the complicity of the Belarusian regime and the Union State, as well as to issue arrest warrants for their key officials.

Methodology

Freedom House, ZMINA, and RCHR, developed a research methodology to accurately and efficiently search for, collect, and store information on cases of the displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarus. The methodology draws upon two pillars: confidential data provided exclusively to Freedom House by BELPOL, and open-source materials identified by the report authors. Engagement with these materials drew substantially upon the Berkeley Protocol on Open-Source Investigations, including detailed steps on documenting from open sources, proper recording, sharing, and storing of information.⁵

BELPOL is an independent Belarusian civil society organization based outside of Belarus to avoid political persecution. It was founded in 2020 by former members of the country's law enforcement bodies who defected from their respective agencies in protest of the mass political repression launched by the regime following mass demonstrations against the year's rigged presidential election, which saw Aleksandr Lukashenko reassert his hold on power. The organization maintains contacts who provide them with confidential information that would otherwise be inaccessible. For this report, these contacts provided documents containing data such as the names of children displaced from the temporarily occupied territories to Belarus between 2022 and 2023, along with corroborating documents such as train tickets, internal correspondence, and other information that could help identify Ukrainian children. BELPOL shared a significant portion of this data exclusively with Freedom House.

Researchers drew upon open-source materials in order to, firstly, verify the data from BELPOL and, secondly, establish the itineraries of displaced

children and the treatment to which the Belarusian regime subjected them. These open-source materials include approximately 200 websites and media outlets, as well as the social media pages of representatives of the Russian, Belarusian, and occupying administrations. Researchers selected these sources based on their accessibility, the level of detail they provided, and their clear connections to the Belarusian regime. They also sought to reference media outlets better known to international audiences. Researchers additionally monitored the social media accounts of individuals, NGOs, foundations, displaced children, and their families. Crucially, researchers used the Mnemonic software, which allows the archiving of metadata so that it can be accessed even if the authors of the content delete it. These archiving efforts have been particularly important given the Russian and Belarusian regimes' attempts to hide or delete information that could lead to the identification and location of displaced Ukrainian children.

Freedom House, ZMINA, RCHR, and Viasna structured their research around two international legal frameworks: the Geneva Convention IV (1949) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The Geneva Convention contains protocols on the protection of civilians during war and the protection of victims of international armed conflicts. The Convention on the Rights of the Child obligates signatory states to uphold children's rights to identity, education, development, and protection from harmful practices. Ukraine and Russia are parties to both conventions. These frameworks provide the basis for legal conclusions on the displacement, political indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children in Belarus.

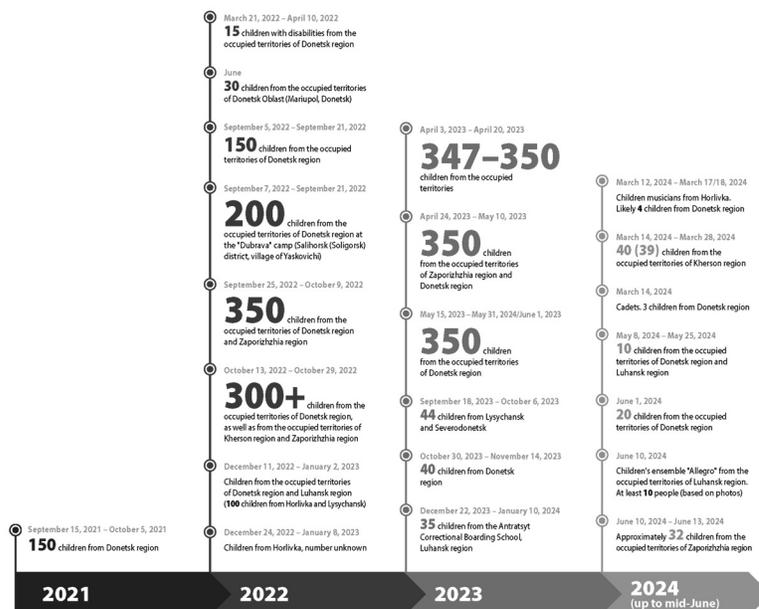
Key Findings

- 1 Aleksandr Lukashenko personally laid the foundation for the displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarusian territory.** A 2021 order on the “organizing recreation and health improvement for children from Donbas” signed by Lukashenko set the precedent for the Belarusian regime’s active involvement in the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children.⁶ Beyond the 2021 order, the authoritarian, personalized nature of the regime means that none of the actions outlined in this report can occur without Lukashenko’s explicit approval. The process has intensified during Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The researchers of this report have identified 2,219 children as having been displaced to Belarus since 2021. Due to the efforts of the complicit entities and individuals to hide the locations and identities of children, it is not yet known how many of the children have returned to the occupied areas of Ukraine.
- 2 The Belarusian regime is actively implementing a Russian state policy of destroying Ukrainian identity through the systematic indoctrination of children.** Experts have frequently highlighted this narrative of de-Ukrainization (that Ukrainians are “really” Russian) as part of Moscow’s broader genocidal incitement and actions, as this narrative denies the existence of Ukrainian national identity and frequently occurs alongside Russian atrocities targeting Ukrainian identity.⁷ The regime enrolls Ukrainian children in Belarusian educational institutions where the language of instruction is Russian, and the curriculum promotes the “Russian World” (Russkiy Mir) and other Russian propaganda narratives. These narratives include hatred of other nationalities, including Ukrainians. The regime furthers the indoctrination process through so-called cultural programs, in which political, religious, and cultural figures tell Ukrainian children that they are, in fact, Russian. In several of the open-source materials referenced by researchers, representatives of the Belarusian regime refer to these children as “young Russians” or “children of Donbas,” but never “Ukrainian children.”⁸
- 3 The Belarusian regime is complicit in Russia’s militarization of Ukrainian children.** The country’s authorities force Ukrainian children to visit law enforcement agencies and military units, as well as to meet with representatives of Belarusian military and youth military organizations. While the curriculums followed by Belarusian children are pro-regime and involve some military elements, the programs to which the Belarusian regime subjects Ukrainian children are distinct because of their emphasis on erasing Ukrainian children’s national identity.
- 4 The Union State of Russia and Belarus plays a critical role in financing and organizing the displacement, indoctrination, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children.** The Union State’s secretary of state, Dmitry Mezentsev, and the chairman of its council of ministers, Mikhail Mishustin, have both repeatedly referred to the provision of “humanitarian aid” to children from Donbas. As detailed in Chapter Three, this “humanitarian aid,” in fact, refers to the displacement of Ukrainian children from occupied areas of Ukraine. In 2022 and 2023, the Union State allocated over \$300,000 for this purpose.
- 5 GONGOs play an essential role in the Belarusian regime’s implementation of Russian policy.** The most prominent of these organizations is the Aliaksei Talai Foundation, founded by the Belarusian paralympic athlete of the same name. Without GONGOs and the funding, connections, and infrastructure they provide, the Belarusian regime would not be able to implement its policy of displacement, indoctrination, and militarization on such an extensive scale.
- 6 The Belarusian and Russian regimes are exploiting Ukrainian children for propaganda purposes.** Belarusian authorities force Ukrainian children to appear in photos and video footage broadcast on state media in both countries with the aim of justifying and legitimizing their displacement, indoctrination, and militarization. Authorities force children to appear in such content without regard for their best interests, privacy, or the potential for re-traumatization.

Chapter 1

Chronology of displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarus: before and after the full-scale invasion

Figure 1. Chronology of Displacements



The investigation has revealed that the Belarusian regime displaced 2,219 Ukrainian children to Belarus from 2021 to June 2024 through the pathways described below. Report researchers confirmed that, as part of the Kremlin's system of indoctrinating Ukrainian children, at least 27 of the 2,219 displaced children were taken not only to Belarus but also to Russia. For the remaining children, either the displacement was limited to Belarus, or insufficient information is available

to make a definitive conclusion as to whether they were transported beyond Belarus. Nevertheless, this information is significant, as it shows how the Russian and Belarusian systems are connected. Twelve-year-old Leda Maiorova from Makiivka in the Donetsk Region, for example, was in the Dubrava camp in Belarus in September 2022. In January 2023, she visited the Kremlin Christmas tree, and in August 2023 she was in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, more than

Figure 2. Affected Regions / Number of Displacement cases



three thousand kilometers from home, for “medical treatment.”⁷⁹ There are many cases like Leda’s. However, as most of these children come from the occupied territories, which are difficult to access, it is difficult to verify these cases.

Brief overview of key instances:

2021: After the 2020 Belarusian presidential election, which was widely recognized as neither free nor fair, Lukashenko signed a decree on the “Rehabilitation of a group of children from Donetsk region” at the Zubronak Children’s Educational and Recreational Center.⁸⁰ The Belarusian regime displaced 150 Ukrainian children to Belarus between September 15 and October 5, 2021, most of whom were children from orphanages in Donetsk, a city in Ukraine occupied by Russia since 2014.⁸¹ Children from the same institution were among the first to be deported to Russia a few days before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.⁸² Aliaksei Talai launched a fundraising campaign, ostensibly for the rehabilitation of children with disabilities from Donbas in Belarus.⁸³

2022: With the launch of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Belarusian regime escalated displacement of Ukrainian children from previously and newly occupied territories.⁸⁴ Aliaksei Talai and Olha Volkova, the head of the Donetsk-based GONGO Dolphins,

became key implementers of this process of moving children to locations in Belarus. In March, individuals working on behalf of the Belarusian regime displaced 15 children with disabilities to the Astrashytski Haradok Rehabilitation Center. In June, they displaced 30 children to the Volma sanatorium. In September, they displaced 650 to the Dubrava camp.⁸⁵ They also displaced 52 children aged 8 to 13 from Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko for Ukrainian children in occupied Ukrainian territory to Dubrava camp.⁸⁶ Sources reveal that another 600 Ukrainian children – including 16 cadets – were in the same camp in October.⁸⁷ In December, the Belarusian regime displaced 40 children to Zalatyia Piaski sanatorium and another 43 children (including those whose parents were killed during the war) to the Belarus Hotel in Navapolatsk (Novopolotsk).⁸⁸ The year concluded with the displacement of another group of children, though the precise number could not be determined from the source photo that Belarusian pro-governmental blogger posted on Telegram.⁸⁹

2023: In April, the Belarusian regime displaced 700 Ukrainian children – including 30 orphans aged 5 to 15 years old from the Anratsyt correctional boarding school.⁹⁰ The parents of a number of these orphans had been killed during the war. Olha Telychko, the school principal, facilitated this displacement, obeying the order of the Luhansk occupation authorities’ education ministry.⁹¹ Talai and Volkova orchestrated the displacement of another 350 children to Dubrava,



Image 1. Aliaksei Talai (left) in occupied Donetsk city.

Date: May 2022 | Source: Nasha Niva

and 11 children with disabilities to the Astrashytski Haradok center.²² In May, 350 children were sent to the Dubrava camp, travelling via Rostov-on-Don in Russia.²³ In September, 44 children were sent to Belarus and attended local schools there with the support of the town-forming enterprises: the Palimir and Naftan plants.²⁴ In October, 40 children were sent to the Kolas Rehabilitation and Health Center in the Kobrynski (Kobrynsky) district of Brest region.²⁵ In November, 40 children, including 10 children from a family-type orphanage (a model of care for orphan children that simulates family environment and rarely accommodates more than a dozen of children) who were accompanied by their legal guardian, were located in the Kolas Rehabilitation and Health Center.²⁶ In December, 35 children were sent to Dubrovenka in the Mahiliou (Mogilev) district to celebrate the New Year and Christmas.²⁷ During their stay in the sanatorium, the adults responsible forced the children to undergo an intrusive and unnecessary “medical examination.”²⁸

2024: In March, the Belarusian regime displaced 40 children from the Kherson Region to Lesnaia Poliana Rehabilitation and Health Center, billing it as “reward for excellent students and activists.”²⁹ The displacement took place with the support of the head of the occupation administration of the Kherson Region, Volodymyr Saldo, and the head of the occupation

authorities’ Department for Work with Evacuees, Tetiana Kuzmich.³⁰ In May, Eleonora Fedorenko, the adviser to the head of the occupation Donetsk People’s Republic’s office for children’s rights, accompanied another group to the Dubrovenka sanatorium, including six children with disabilities who had suffered injuries from explosives.³¹ The Russian Embassy in Belarus supported the displacement of 32 more children in June.³²

At least 2,219 Ukrainian children were displaced to Belarus between 2021 and June 2024, a pattern that reflects a large-scale, systematic transfer orchestrated by the Belarusian and Russian regimes. This consistent movement of children, even prior to Russian authorities’ escalation of the war, signals a deliberate and organized effort to indoctrinate and uproot them. Of these children, at least 27 were taken not only to Belarus but also to Russia, further underscoring the scope of this coordinated operation. Moreover, the Belarusian regime was more active in the displacement of Ukrainian children to its territory during the school years of 2022 and 2023 than during the summers those same years, suggesting that it is using the school system to indoctrinate, reeducate, and militarize Ukrainian children. It also contradicts the proclaimed “recreational” purpose of the displacement, which would be more typical during the summer.

Chapter 2

Re-education and militarization: Belarus as part of the Russian system

Figure 3. Routes of Children's Displacement

**Train 3025 Adler-Minsk:**

Primorskaya Station (Rostov-on-Don) 04:08 (24.09.2022) – Minsk-Passenger Station 18:59 (25.09.2022) Dubrava

**Train 3025 Adler-Minsk:**

Primorskaya Station (Rostov-on-Don) 04:08 (24.09.2022) – Minsk-Passenger Station 18:59 (25.09.2022) Novopolotsk

The Belarusian regime reproduces the measures implemented by Russian authorities in occupied regions of Ukraine and in Russia to systematically displace, indoctrinate, and militarize Ukrainian children. Belarusian authorities publicly justify the transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus as “rehabilitation” and “recreation,” replicating word-for-word the Russian justification for the

children's displacement and deportation. As is the case in Russia, this campaign not only places children in camps or sanatoriums, but also enrolls them in local schools, all the while implementing a “cultural program” that reproduces the narratives promoted by the Kremlin aimed at the Russification of the children and erasure of their Ukrainian identity.

2.1 Re-education camps: propaganda in the curriculum and recreation activities

Though Belarusian authorities publicly justify the transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus as “rehabilitation” and “recreation,” the largest groups of children are transported during the autumn and spring when school is in session, rather than in the summer. As in Russia, they are enrolled in local educational institutions.

At least two groups of children who were in Navapolatsk in December 2022 and September 2023 attended classes in local Belarusian schools.³³ This education is in the Russian language and includes, among other things, the promotion of “Russian World” narratives about the nature and course of World War II, and incitement to hatred of other nations, including Ukraine. A vivid example is the “Genocide of the Belarusian people” law and associated course, which attributes atrocities orchestrated by the Nazi German regime to Ukrainians and others and constitutes a part

of the curriculum starting from primary school.³⁴ It also conflates Ukrainian desires for self-determination with the actions of groups and individuals who collaborated with the Nazis.

Moreover, the immersion of Ukrainian children into these Russian regime sponsored narratives also takes place outside of the classroom. For example, the Belarusian state identifies Ukrainian children in Belarus as “Russians” and recognizes the Russian citizenship that was imposed on them.³⁵ Belarus’s state-controlled media refers to them as “young and new citizens of Russia,” as do organizers of visits to Belarus, including Aliaksei Talai.³⁶ This practice denies the Ukrainian children their identity and nationality. Belarusian authorities and organizers of the visits systematically persuade Ukrainian children that Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories belong to Russia.

Belarusian public figures and officials who promote anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian world ideology often speak to Ukrainian children from the occupied territories during events. For example, on April 13, 2023, the Dubrava camp held a meeting between the children and political



Image 2. Cadets of the 6th platoon (grade) of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko, occupied Donetsk city.

Date: Month not stated in source, 2024 | Source: Profile of RBOU 'School No. 4 – Zakharchenko Cadet Corps' on the 'Gosuslugi' portal



Image 3. Children from the occupied regions of Donetsk, Minsk, Unit 3214 of the Interior Ministry's military unit.
Date: June 2022 | Source: Confidential data transfer from BELPOL

commentator Aliaksandr Shpakouski and First Secretary of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union Aliaksandr Lukyanau.³⁷ Shpakouski is on the Ukrainian sanctions list for supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the idea of stationing nuclear weapons in Belarus, while the Belarusian Republican Youth Union that Lukyanau heads is a youth-focused GONGO affiliated with Lukashenko.

In another example, singers Valiantsina Lukuts-Hruzdzeva and Aliaksandra Kuzniatsova-Hruzdova, during their performance at a concert at the Dubrava camp, said in a speech to the children that they wished for the presidents of United States and Ukraine to die, and for Russia to occupy the entirety of Ukraine.³⁸ Representatives of the Communist Party of Belarus also met with children from the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk, reportedly talking to them about “the new regions of Russia.”³⁹

Children from the occupied territories are also included in propaganda events promoting the Kremlin's version of World War II. These include Kremlin-approved celebrations of May 9, Victory Day, an occasion Putin has used as a tool to promote his own leadership and military objectives.⁴⁰ Victory Day and other World War II-related events are used by the Russian and Belarusian regimes as justification for the war in Ukraine, claiming that the full-scale invasion is a modern-day version of the Soviet battle against the Nazis. Teaching the children these narratives is part of the broader Russification of the children and the efforts to erase their Ukrainian identity.

2.2 Exploitation of Ukrainian children in propaganda

Ukrainian children become propaganda tools during their stay in Belarus, which subjects them to retraumatization.

In the stories produced by Belarusian media, children tell the camera about the shelling and injuries they or their relatives suffered. The journalists primarily ask leading questions related to traumatic topics: shelling, children's feelings in the context of hostilities, whether “broken windows” are the norm, among other topics.⁴¹ The journalists' persistent questioning, requiring detailed recollection and reenactment of traumatic events, repeatedly brings children to tears.⁴²

In addition to presenting “children's stories,” the authorities and organizers use children to broadcast propaganda narratives. On Belarusian television, children use Russian propaganda terms, such as referring to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine as a “special military operation.” They similarly claim that “Ukrainian militants are shelling the city randomly;” “Mariupol is beginning to revive;” and “Russia is saving us.” The children also present themselves as “Russian children.” In one of the stories, the interviewer directly asks a Ukrainian boy on camera whether he would go to war if he were older. The boy answers that he would, because “Ukraine came to my land and is killing people like me.”⁴³

The filming of children for propaganda is done with absolute disregard for their privacy. In some reports, the videos mention and caption the child's real name and surname, as well as other personal data such as the city where the child came from and their age. Sometimes other material is pictured that can be used to easily identify a particular child.⁴⁴

2.3 Militarization: training new Russian soldiers

A characteristic feature of the Russian occupation of the territory of Ukraine and the transfer of Ukrainian children to the territory of Russia is the involvement of Ukrainian children in militarized youth organizations and propaganda of service in the Russian Armed Forces.⁴⁵ Given that militarization is aimed at preparing and recruiting children for future service in Russian military organizations, militarization during the children's stay in Belarus is mainly manifested in excursions and meetings with law enforcement agencies, the military, or militarized youth organizations in Belarus.

For example, a cultural program for children from Donetsk and Mariupol who stayed at the Volma sanatorium in Belarus in June 2022 included a visit to the Khatyn Memorial Complex for Belarusians who died during World War II and a visit to the Interior Ministry's military unit 3214. During the visit, military officials organized a tour of the unit and a parade ground concert, and military academy cadets demonstrated elements of hand-to-hand combat. In photos of the event, children are holding weapons, and one boy in the group is wearing a t-shirt with the Latin letter "Z," a symbol used widely by the Kremlin to drum up support for the invasion of Ukraine.⁴⁶

In April 2023, the children from occupied regions of Ukraine met with members of the Salihorsk (Soligorsk) military-patriotic club Rodnik, at the Dubrava camp.⁴⁷ Representatives of the club were dressed in stylized Soviet military uniforms from World War II, another example of the use of the World War II narratives in Russian-Belarusian propaganda.

In June 2024, the Personnel Training Center of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) of Belarus held a concert for children from the Donetsk Region

who were undergoing rehabilitation in Astrashytski Haradok.⁴⁸

It is common for children to meet with representatives of Belarusian law enforcement agencies – for example, the Juvenile Inspectorate of the District Department of Internal Affairs and the Main Department for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption – and military members from the Interior Ministry's 3214 unit.⁴⁹ The program during such events is usually very similar: officials give children a tour, show them weapons, and teach them how to use the weapons.

Belarusian authorities arrange meetings with representatives of military units or military departments of higher education institutions whenever possible. Children from Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk, who were returning to their homes in occupied Ukraine in October 2023, met with cadets of the military transport faculty of the Belarusian State University of Transport at the railway station in Homel.⁵⁰

Forced participation in militarized propaganda, which is implemented by Belarusian authorities in Belarus according to the Russian system, also includes children in areas of occupied Ukraine. Occupation authorities record videos, for example, with children from Horlivka "thanking" the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs. In the video, children imitate military gestures and chant lines from a propaganda song.⁵¹

Groups of children in Belarus also include those that Russian authorities have already subjected to militarization. For example, from September to October 2022, fifteen-year-old Zelkovska Sofia from Donetsk Region, who had become a member of Russia's national youth military movement, was in the Dubrava camp. In 2023, she attended the Fake! camp near Smolensk in Russia. In another case, seventeen-year-old Myroslava Zaporozhets, who had become a member of the Movement of the First, another Russian youth movement, was in Navapolatsk from September to October 2023 and actively participated in propaganda stories.

It is likely that such travel opportunities are used as forms of incentives or rewards for already-militarized children in facilities in occupied Ukraine. When they go on these trips, these already-militarized children may serve as an additional factor of influence on the children they join in Belarus.

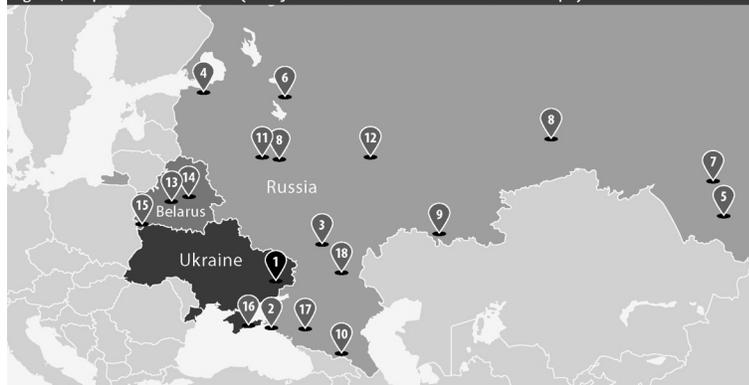
2.4 Model of militarization: Cadet Corps. O. Zakharchenko

One of the most vivid examples of the militarization of Ukrainian children is the Cadet Corps. O. Zakharchenko, which has ties with the government of Belarus and the Aliaksei Talai Foundation.⁵²

Cadet Corps. O. Zakharchenko (hereafter, “Cadet Corps”) was established in Donetsk in 2017, during the lifetime of the Oleksandr Zakharchenko, the first leader of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and on his personal initiative.⁵³ According to Cadet Corps director Oksana Tselikivska, the purpose of the Cadet Corps was to “bring children back to school.”⁵⁴ Thus, militarization objectives were established for children from occupied areas in Donetsk region even before the 2022 full-scale invasion.

Occupation authorities use the Cadet Corps to create an illusion of an elite education system. As of 2024, the Corps included around 200 children, both male and female, some as young as first graders.⁵⁵ According to the director, the authority of the Cadet Corps is created by “the high quality of education and the level of patriotic education.”⁵⁶ Children studying in the first through fourth grades are called *prokadets* and wear military dress uniforms.⁵⁷ Tselikivska notes that while only boys study in lyceums and military schools, boys and girls may be cadets.⁵⁸ Article 51 of the Fourth Geneva Convention stipulates that the “the Occupying Power may not compel protected persons to serve in its armed or auxiliary forces.”⁵⁹ Placing Ukrainian children from the occupied territories in military institutions such as the Cadet Corps may constitute a violation of Article 51 since could be aimed at preparing them for future enlistment in the Russian or Belarusian military.

Figure 4. Displacement of Children (mainly cadets from the Zakharchenko Cadet Corps.) across Belarus and Russia



1. **Cadet Corps. O. Zakharchenko** in Donetsk;
2. **Vocational Training Camp “Smena”** near Anapa;
3. **Festival “Cadet Symphony”** – Uvarovo, Tambov region, Russia;
4. **Naval School** in St. Petersburg;
5. **Camp “Kristal”** in Barnaul;
6. **Vocational Summer School** in Vologda. In the morning, both the Russian and Belarusian flags were raised;
7. **Cadet Corps. O. Zakharchenko** – Novosibirsk;
8. **Military-Patriotic Congress “Meshcherskie Zori”** – Vladimir Oblast, Russia;
9. **Travel across Russia as part of the “Heroes from Our Yard!” project** – specifically, Tyumen;
10. **Climbing Mount Elbrus;**
11. **ANO “School of Contemporary Art”** in Moscow Oblast;
12. **Chuvash Cadet Corps** – Cheboksary, Chuvash Republic;
13. **20th Spartakiad of the Union State** in Minsk, Republic of Belarus;
14. **Meeting with members of Belarusian youth military-patriotic organizations** – Minsk;
15. **Visit to Brest Hero-Fortress** – Brest, Republic of Belarus;
16. **Suvorov all-Russian Sports Festival** – Crimea, Alushta;
17. **Military-Patriotic Festival “Post No. 1”** – Krasnodar;
18. **Victory Parade** – Volgograd.

Efforts to militarize children and shape them ideologically through the Cadet Corps are present not only in schoolwork, but in extracurricular activities. The cadets participate in many events dedicated to commemorating the Russian narrative about World War II and the participation of the Soviet Union in the war. For several years, the cadets have been holding a thematic mural competition, "Drawing Victory Together," and have participated in events dedicated to the day the war began in the Soviet Union and the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Donbas. They have also participated in the Ribbon of Saint George campaign, a World War II commemoration that the Kremlin has leveraged to boost support for the Ukraine invasion,⁶⁰ and have been standing guard on the Day of Unified Action in memory of the victims of crimes against the Soviet people committed by the Nazis and their collaborators, an occasion the Kremlin has used similarly.

Cadet trips to Belarus also played a role in ideological indoctrination and militarization. In Belarus, the cadets visited another place significant for the context of the Great Patriotic War – the Brest Fortress.⁶¹ The Aliaksei Talai Foundation built the monument as part of the "Living Memory of Grateful Generations" project, other locations of which the cadets also visited.⁶² These visits fit into the same narrative of militarization.

The cadets also meet with people who took part in combat operations on the side of Russia or the USSR

in various wars: a demobilized student from Donetsk region, Novosibirsk Cossacks fighting in Donbas, the mother of a "Hero of Russia" who died near Kherson, members of the organizations Combat Brotherhood and Officers of Russia.⁶³

Cadet Corps students are surrounded by many ideological markers during their studies and extracurricular activities meant to emphasize that they are Russians and at the same time citizens of the so-called DPR. The Cadet Corps celebrates the so-called Day of the DPR's Return to Russia, and the ceremonial raising of the Russian flag.⁶⁴ During the initiation into the Cadet Corps, children say, "I serve the Russian Federation and the Cadet Corps."⁶⁵ The ceremonial event "I am a future cadet" takes place against the background of a banner reading, "Russian All-Military Union."⁶⁶

At the same time, the cadets honor the "heroes of Donbas," celebrate the 10th anniversary of the formation of the DPR, write a dictation, "Memory of Donbas since 2014," and take part in a photo shoot with DPR fighters.⁶⁷

Children have appeared on Russian television and social media repeating the narratives imposed on them. One child composed a poem entitled, "The FSB is our reliable bulwark." Others express a desire to "become special forces" and sing ideological songs.⁶⁸



Image 4. Ukrainian children who are now members of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko with servicemen of the 345th Separate Guards Airborne Regiment of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Uvarovo (Tambov region, Russian Federation). Date: May 2023 | Source: Official Telegram channel of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko



Image 5. Children from the occupied regions of Donetsk with Unit 3214 of the Interior Ministry's military unit in Minsk, Belarus. Date: June 2022 | Source: Confidential data transfer from BELPOL

The ideological processing received during their studies also influences their life choices. Oleh Kriuchenkov, a 2023 Cadet Corps graduate who chose a career in the Russian army, took part in the Victory Parade in Moscow on Red Square in 2024.⁶⁹ Another 2023 graduate of the Cadet Corps, Danyil Olmezov, took part in the Victory Parade in Volgograd in 2024.⁷⁰

The Cadet Corps and Aliaksei Talai are united not only by ideology, but also by ties within the occupation administration of the Donetsk region. For example, they cooperate closely with Olha Volkova's Dolphins (*Delfin*) organization.⁷¹ Children from Dolphins and cadets took part in a joint ideological flash mob on Victory Day in 2023, and the Cadet Corps' official Telegram channel regularly reposts from Volkova's channel.⁷² The Cadet Corps' administration and the Aliaksei Talai Foundation have a long history of cooperation. The walls of the Cadet Corps building display the symbols of the Aliaksei Talai Foundation.⁷³ The official Telegram channel of the Cadet Corps reposts material from Talai's page.⁷⁴

The cadets and their teachers have also been participating in trips to Belarus under the leadership of the Aliaksei Talai Foundation since 2021. Alona Levytska, then a Cadet Corps teacher, accompanied the children on their first trip to Belarus that year to the Zubronak camp.⁷⁵ Since then, she has taken cadets to Belarus several times a year.⁷⁶ As of 2024, Levytska is no longer a teacher at the Cadet Corps, but an advisor

to the Donetsk occupation government's director of education,⁷⁷ tasked with indoctrinating students with the described pro-Kremlin ideology.⁷⁸ Several other Cadet Corps members, including teacher-librarian Inna Kosarytska, regularly accompany the children to Belarus.⁷⁹

These cadets are often not only the objects of militarization and ideological indoctrination, but also its actors. For example, the cadets were featured in a video by pro-Putin singer Yulia Chicherina.⁸⁰ During the cadets' visit to Belarus, they met with members of Belarusian military, patriotic clubs, and Belarusian cadets.⁸¹ Occupation authorities broadcast the cadets' statements, which align with the Russian ideological narrative about the "horrors of war that Ukraine brought to Donbas."⁸²

Cadets who frequently visited Belarus and Russia have appeared in the media making passionate ideological statements that suggest that indoctrination efforts have been successful. Anastasiia Khaunova, who visited Belarus and Russia as a cadet, heads the volunteer cadet brigade Edynychka, which sends aid to the Russian military.⁸³ In one video, she gives an ideological speech about her activities and calls Russia "our great Motherland."⁸⁴ In another video, Rafik Sultanov, a 2024 graduate who has been to Belarus several times and studied for six months at the Novosibirsk Cadet Corps, reads Alexander Pushkin's poem "To the Slanderers of Russia," which is commonly used by the modern Russian Federation to justify the wars it launches.⁸⁵

Chapter 3

How the Belarusian regime organizes and finances the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian Children

To understand the role and place of Belarusian authorities in the system of displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children, it is necessary to identify the main organizers of the process, their connections with each other, and sources of funding.

The occupation administrations play a crucial role in the displacement of Ukrainian children from the occupied territories. Aliaksei Talai has highlighted their role, confirming that he acts in cooperation with these entities.⁸⁶

One example of a representative of an occupation administration official facilitating this process is Mykhailo Krushakov, the Donetsk occupation authorities' so-called first deputy minister of education and science. In a formal letter, Krushakov writes about the "departure of children of privileged categories" for "recreation"

to the Dubrava camp in Belarus and asks the director of school No. 4, Oksana Tselikovska, to compile lists of children aged six to fifteen to be sent on this trip.⁸⁷

The head of occupied Melitopol, Volodymyr Rohov, does not hide his involvement in the transfer of children, stating in a Telegram post that 100 children were sent from the Zaporizhzhia region to Belarus.⁸⁸

The director of the Anratsyt correctional school, Olha Telychko, stressed that the children traveled with her "by order of the Ministry of Education of the Luhansk People's Republic."⁸⁹

On June 3, 2024, Talai met for the first time with the head of the occupation administration of the Donetsk region, Denys Pushylin, promising to continue "improving the health of Donbas children."⁹⁰



Image 6. Aliaksei Talai meeting children from occupied Donetsk city at the Astrashytski Haradok Rehabilitation Center in Minsk region, Belarus.
Date: August 1, 2023 | Source: Malanka Media

Figure 5. Five Categories of Complicit Actors





Image 7. Russian President Vladimir Putin awarding Aliaksei Talai the Order of Friendship in the Kremlin, Moscow.
Date: May 2024 | Source: Official website of the President of the Russian Federation



Image 8. Ukrainian children who are now members of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko participating in a lesson "dedicated to the 106th anniversary of the Donbas State Security Agencies" in occupied Donetsk.
Date: May 2024 | Source: Official Telegram channel of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko

3.1 The displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children in Belarus

The Belarusian authorities fully support the transfer of children from occupied Ukraine to the territory of Belarus. This is evidenced not only by the documents signed at the level of the Union State, which will be discussed below, but also by the infrastructure used to organize the arrival, stay, and ideological indoctrination of the children. Belarusian state authorities, ranging from Lukashenko to representatives of regional authorities and state institutions, are involved in organizing the process of displacement, reeducation, and militarization.

In August 2023, during a visit to Minsk airport and Minsk Civil Aviation Plant No. 407, Lukashenko said that support and "rehabilitation" of the "children of Donbas" would continue. He also confirmed an agreement with Vladimir Putin to finance this campaign from the Union State's budget.⁹¹ At the same time, he emphasized that Aliaksei Talai is handling the issue of Ukrainian children. In October 2023, Talai himself once again stressed the support of Lukashenko for his activities.⁹²

State-owned enterprises own all camps and sanatoriums where the children stay. JSC Belaruskali, the state mining company, owns the Dubrava children's health camp.⁹³ The Volma sanatorium is a departmental sanatorium of the state transportation enterprise Minsktrans.⁹⁴ OJSC Homelprambud, construction company, owns the Zalatya Plaski sanatorium.⁹⁵ The Republican Children's Hospital for Medical Rehabilitation in Astrashytski Haradok is a state medical institution.

Belarusian police officers, from the juvenile affairs inspectorate to internal troops, take part in the activities with children at these and other locations.⁹⁶ Participation by the police also indicates state sponsorship of indoctrination activities.

Local Belarusian officials are also actively engaged with children from occupied territories of Ukraine. The Navapolatsk city authorities authorized and coordinated the stay of children from Lysychansk in Navapolatsk from November to December 2023. The deputy head of the Navapolatsk executive committee for social issues, Andrei Adzinochkin, the head of the Navapolatsk city council of deputies, Aleh Buyevich, and the head of the Navapolatsk executive committee, Dzmitry Dziamidau, were

involved in this case.⁹⁷ In addition, the principal of the Navapolatsk gymnasium No. 2, Tatsiana Lubinskaya, was involved, as the children studied in this educational institution during their stay in Belarus. Among the state-owned companies that sponsored the children's visit was Naftan, an oil refiner, which has been under renewed European sanctions since July 3, 2022.⁹⁸ It is likely that of the Navapolatsk hotel complex director Natallia Poliakova, who appeared in a media story about the children's stay in Belarus, is also a collaborator.⁹⁹

In another case, Vitali Utkin, a member of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus, met the children from Horlivka, who were traveling to a March 2023 music festival in Minsk, at the train platform in Homel.¹⁰⁰ The Minsk City Executive Committee also supported the visit of children from Horlivka to military unit 3214.¹⁰¹

On October 6, 2023, Utkin, representatives of JV OJSC Spartak, a confectionary; machinery firm Saleo-Homel; the branch of the public transportation network in Homel (Bus Park No. 6); students at the Belarusian State University of Transport; and members of the Belarusian Republican Youth Union accompanied 40 children from Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk to various locations.¹⁰²

The governor of Mahiliou Region, Anatoli Isachanka, has expressed support for the idea of "rehabilitating Donbas children in Belarus," by inviting a group of children to travel to Mahiliou.¹⁰³

The deputy chairman of the Brest regional executive committee, Vadzim Krauchuk, and the chairman of the executive committee, Yury Shuleika, met children who arrived in the Brest Region on October 30, 2023, from Dokuchaevsk and Mariupol.¹⁰⁴ Shuleika handed the children sweets.

In December 2023, the Homel and Mahiliou executive committees, including the deputy chairman of the Homel executive committee, Dzmitry Aleinikau, met children from the Anratsy correctional boarding school at the railway station in Homel.¹⁰⁵ The deputy chairman of the Mahiliou executive committee, Valery Malashko, welcomed the children at the sanatorium where they lived during their stay in Belarus.¹⁰⁶ In addition to the governor of the Mahiliou Region, Talai also mentioned the Belarusian Railways and the Standing Committee of the Union State as other contributors to the group's arrival.¹⁰⁷

Oleg Gaydukevich, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Belarus and a member of



Image 9. Ukrainian children from Horlivka, occupied Donetsk, visiting Unit 3214 of the Interior Ministry's military unit in Minsk, Belarus.

Date: December 2022 | Source: Official Telegram channel of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus

Belarus's House of Representatives, also publicly expressed support for Talai's initiatives.¹⁰⁸ It is also worth paying attention to the support of Talai and his activities by the Belarusian State Concern for Oil and Chemistry (Belneftekhim). The Talai Foundation gave recognition to Belneftekhim for its support and financial assistance in implementing the foundation's "charitable projects."¹⁰⁹

Belarusian state media also carries adulatory coverage of these visits, another indication of the government's full support for the removal of children from the occupied regions of Ukraine. State-owned outlets such as the BelTA Information Agency, ATN: News of Belarus and the World, the National State Television and Radio Company of the Republic of Belarus (Belteleradio), and the ONT TV channel regularly published propaganda photos and videos about the "recreation and rehabilitation" of children from the occupied territories. In addition, the Sputnik Belarus news agency is part of the Russian multimedia group Sputnik 15, and broadcasts similar material.¹¹⁰

3.2 The connection and contribution of the Belarusian regime to Russia's broader policy of displacement, reeducation, and militarization

A critical actor in the joint campaign of the Russian and Belarusian states to displace and reeducate children from the occupied territories of Ukraine is Aliaksei Talai, and his Aliaksei Talai Foundation. Based in Belarus, Talai is actively involved in taking children to camps in the country, organizing a "cultural program" for them, and financing the process.

Talai has been involved in the creation of the Russian state narrative about purported crimes of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the east of Ukraine, including through activities at the parliamentary commission of the Russian Duma.¹¹¹ He frequently gives voice to these narratives, including on October 27, 2023, during his participation in the "Faith, Hope, Love" forum and festival of family dynasties in the Russian city of Suzdal, where Talai referred to the "criminal Kyiv regime" and "new regions of the Russian Federation."¹¹²

BIO: Aliaksei Talai is a Belarusian paralympian and founder of the Talai Foundation (wetogether.by). The foundation's stated aim is to help people with disabilities and children without parents or deprived of parental care. Talai is an avid supporter of Lukashenko's regime in Belarus, as well as Putin's regime in Russia. He holds close personal and business relationships with representatives of Belarusian and Russian governments, as well as their regional representatives. Talai is one of the central actors in the displacement of Ukrainian children to Belarus and in ensuring their participation in reeducation and militarization programs.

Aliaksei Talai calls Russian ambassador to Belarus Borys Hryzlov a "great friend" and in October 2023 presented him with an award from his foundation for supporting the implementation and development of the humanitarian aid project "With Love from Belarus to Donbas Families."¹¹³ Hryzlov in October 2023 voiced support for the transfer of children to Belarus, and condemned "Western diplomats" for refusing to join a propaganda meeting in Belarus between representatives of diplomatic missions of Western countries and Ukrainian children from the occupied territories.¹¹⁴

On November 8, 2023, President Putin signed a decree awarding Aliaksei Talai the Order of Friendship "for merits in strengthening friendship and cooperation between peoples, fruitful activities for rapprochement, and mutual enrichment of cultures of nations and peoples." On May 30, 2024, Talai received the order directly from Putin's hands.¹¹⁵

On October 12, 2023, Talai took part in a forum at Belarus's national library called "History for the Future: Russia and Belarus." During his speech, he delivered Russkiy Mir propaganda narratives about the "united Fatherland."¹¹⁶ It was at this forum that Aliaksei Talai and his foundation initiated cooperative activities with the Russian House in Homel, a state-funded Russian organization based in Belarus.¹¹⁷

Talai has also established connections with Russian local authorities, participating in municipal activities and shoring up support for his foundation. On November 20, 2023, the Ministry of Social Policy of Russia organized a meeting between Talai and local youth, cadets, and veterans in Nizhny Novgorod.¹¹⁸ On November 21, 2023, Talai met with the governor of the Nizhny Novgorod region, Hlieb Nikitnyi. On his Telegram channel, the governor wrote that



Image 10. Ukrainian children who are now members of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko in Amvrosiivka Rehabilitation Center, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation.
Date: December 2023 | Source: Official Telegram channel of the Cadet Corps O. Zakharchenko

he had donated a car to the Talai Foundation to transport humanitarian goods.¹⁹ Talai also visited the Business Cooperation Council of Belarus and the Nizhny Novgorod Region of Russia and held several motivational meetings, including with military personnel who had participated in the invasion of Ukraine.²⁰ In December 2023, Talai took part in a press conference on cooperation on patriotic education between Belarus and Nizhny Novgorod.²¹

Talai's initiatives to "rescue children taken from the war zone" are supported by Yuliia Lozanova (Vitiiazieva), co-owner of occupied Crimea's NewsFront media company, which has been sanctioned by the United States, Australia, Ukraine and others for propaganda.²² In November 2023, a Ukrainian court sentenced Lozanova (Vitiiazieva) to 11 years' imprisonment in absentia for collaborating with Russia and justifying Russian aggression.²³

Representatives of the Russian state have also expressed direct support for the transfer of children

to Belarus. In particular, the staff of the Consulate General of Russia in Hrodna (Belarus), including Consul General Yurii Solomin, attended a meeting with children from the occupied territories of Kherson Region who visited Belarus in March 2024.²⁴ The vice consul also recorded a separate video supporting the children's trip to Belarus.²⁵ According to Belarusian media, the chair of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus, Natalya Kochanova, and the speaker of the Federation Council of Russia, Valentina Matvienko, supported the "rehabilitation" of a group of children who arrived in Homel on May 8, 2024, from occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk.²⁶ Earlier, Belarus's ONT TV news channel reported that the project was supported by the Union State and Lukashenko.²⁷

It is also noteworthy that on November 17, 2023, Talai was a scheduled speaker in Yugra in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region of the Russian Federation at the forum "Civil Initiatives of the 60th Parallel Regions."²⁸ The region's governor, Tamara Komarova, who is

currently under Ukrainian sanctions, organizes the alleged deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children to Yugra and the Khanty-Mansi Regions, making the region one of the major hubs in Russia for this activity.¹²⁹

3.3 The role of the Union State in the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children

The direct involvement of the Union State in displacing and reeducating Ukrainian children began in 2022 and has continued into 2024. The apparatus of the Standing Committee of the Union State has provided consistent financial and organizational support for the initiative at various levels. This is evidenced, among other things, by a March 2023 letter from the secretary of state of the Standing Committee, Dmitry Mezentsev, to the Chairman of Russian Railways, Oleg Belozyorov. Mezentsev not only asks Belozyorov to organize the passage of children from temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine to Belarus, but also refers to the fact that Russian Railways had already done so in 2022. It further refers to the decision of the presidents of Russia and Belarus to systematically provide humanitarian aid to children of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples Republics.¹³⁰ Mezentsev, in a September 2022 statement, referred to a decision by Mikhail Mishustin, who serves as both head of the government of the Russian Federation and as the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Union State of Belarus. In his statement, Mezentsev said that Mishustin had approved the use of Russian Railways for the purpose of rehabilitation of children in Belarusian sanatoriums.¹³¹ The material confirms the systematic practice of taking Ukrainian children to the territory of Belarus, which Lukashenko had called for in a September 2021 order.¹³²

The Union State's budget uses the term "humanitarian aid" to describe spending for the

transfer of children from occupied Ukrainian territory to the Republic of Belarus. According to the resolutions of the Council of Ministers of the Union State and the Supreme State Council of the Union State, up to 29,000,000 Russian rubles (\$334,000) were allocated for this activity in 2022, and up to 20,000,000 (\$230,400) Russian rubles in 2023.¹³³ At the meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State in January 2024, the issue of financing "humanitarian aid" was one of the main issues.¹³⁴ In June 2024, Dmitry Mezentsev stated that assistance to the Donbas republics from the Union State will be continued.¹³⁵

In October 2022, a story by the progovernment Russia 1 TV also channel confirmed that the Union State's budget provided for the funding of the transportation and stay of children from the occupied territories of Ukraine.¹³⁶

As of early November 2023, renovation preparations were underway at the Romanov estate in the Minsk region, which the Belarusian authorities transferred to the Aliaksei Talai Foundation for the creation of a rehabilitation center for children injured in the war.¹³⁷ Talai calls his project a unique union program for the rehabilitation of children and claims that its first group will include children from Ukraine and Belarus.¹³⁸ On November 14, 2023, the Union State's website published an article about the new rehabilitation center, reflecting its support.¹³⁹ In January 2024, Talai met with the Union State's deputy state secretary, Elena Bogdan, Belarusian education minister Andrei Ivanets and his deputy Alexander Kadlubay, as well as the chairman of the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus Vladimir Gusakov, to discuss the center.¹⁴⁰

Additionally, on December 6, 2023, Talai took part in the media forum "Youth for the Union State," during which participants discussed the upbringing of youth according to Russian narratives, integration, and the syncing of educational programs in Russia and Belarus. The forum was attended by officials from both countries.¹⁴¹

Chapter 4

Legal conclusions

The transfer, reeducation, political indoctrination, and militarization of Ukrainian children taken to Belarus violates fundamental rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Among other things, the political indoctrination and reeducation of Ukrainian children and coercion of Ukrainian children to renounce their identity, homeland, culture, and language reach the threshold of inhuman treatment and mental torture. It violates the best interest of the child.

The Belarusian state, as a party to both the CRC and the ICCPR, bears state responsibility for these grave violations. In parallel, Belarusian and Union State officials bear individual criminal responsibility.

The long-term negative consequences of the Russian state policy aimed at eradicating Ukrainian national identity and the scale and systematic nature of the perpetrators' actions constitute several international crimes under the Rome Statute. Belarusian and Union State officials act as accomplices to the main perpetrators: officials of Russia and Russian occupation administrations. These crimes, committed and directed by top Belarusian and Union State officials when it comes to transferring Ukrainian children to Belarus, should be prosecuted by the ICC, specifically through proving its linkage to the **crime of persecution** on discriminatory grounds as outlined in the Rome Statute. In order to prove that the crime of persecution was committed, it is necessary to demonstrate its connection with other crimes enumerated in the Rome Statute of the ICC, which include, *inter alia*, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of genocide. This allows for a determination of the crime of persecution while allowing the continuing linkage to a variety of other crimes as collected by other documenters under this same umbrella crime.

Given the factual circumstances, the evidence collected by this report's documenters, and the initial conclusions of psychologists working with returned Ukrainian children and their assessment of the children's psychological state, it can be asserted that there are elements of the **crime of genocide** (causing serious bodily or mental harm, forcibly transferring children

of the group to another group), **crimes against humanity** (torture, other inhumane acts causing great suffering or physical or mental injury), and a number of **war crimes** (torture or inhuman treatment, great suffering, unlawful deportation or transfer).⁴² While qualifying such crimes will be possible on a case-by-case basis, the report's authors argue that there has been the crime of discriminatory persecution committed in the context of the indoctrination and militarization of Ukrainian children and which can be linked back to a number of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of genocide listed above.

4.1 Violation of fundamental rights and freedoms of the child in terms of Belarusian state responsibility under UN mechanisms

The reeducation of Ukrainian children on the territory of Belarus is based on indirect discrimination, which is prohibited at the universal level in accordance with Article 2 of the CRC and Article 26 of the ICCPR.⁴³ The Belarusian authorities, media, and members of the organizations involved insist that the Ukrainian children are treated the same as Belarusian children, despite the fact that they live under different conditions and have different legal statuses. Ukrainian children have guarantees as civilians from the occupied territory and foreign citizens, which afford them additional rights. Therefore, while Belarusian children can preserve their national identity, as provided for in Article 8 of the CRC, Ukrainian children are deliberately and purposefully deprived of this right to identity,⁴⁴ which is a prerequisite for the realization of all other child rights.⁴⁴

In each case of the transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus, along with a violation of Article 8 of the CRC, there is also a violation of Article 30 of the CRC, namely the right to enjoy one's own culture, language, religion, to be protected from interference with one's identity, and to have a progressive upbringing, sustainable not only in terms of its permanence but also taking into account ethnic, cultural, and linguistic background.⁴⁵

Political indoctrination and militarization, which are part of the “recreation activities” for Ukrainian children in institutions in Belarus, are also a violation of the child's right to freedom of thought and to education.¹⁴⁶

The explicit or implicit coercion of Ukrainian children to renounce their identity, homeland, culture, and language causes significant moral suffering that may be unconscious or only partially understood by the child. We argue that propaganda aimed at convincing Ukrainian children that their knowledge about Ukraine, its history, and politics reaches the threshold of inhuman treatment and mental torture, which is prohibited by Article 7 of the ICCPR, Article 37 of the CRC, and Article 2 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).¹⁴⁷

Considering the Russification and indoctrination of Ukrainian children in Belarus, which causes significant damage to the identity of minors, there are signs of a violation of the principle of the best interests of the child and, accordingly, Article 3 of the CRC. This circumstance makes not only the Russification and indoctrination of underage Ukrainian citizens illegal, but also their transfer to the territory of Belarus. This is even more relevant for orphans and children deprived of parental care. The Belarusian state, as a party to the CRC, the ICCPR, and the CAT bears state responsibility for these severe violations of children's rights on its territory.

4.2 Elements of international crimes in the reeducation of Ukrainian children under the Rome Statute and individual criminal responsibility

The reeducation of Ukrainian children in camps in Belarus has elements of persecution as a crime against humanity under Article 7(1)(h) of the Rome Statute.¹⁴⁸ This article refers to perpetrators targeting a “group or collectivity as such”, a phenomenon identifiable in the way that the perpetrators enumerated in this report targeted a group of Ukrainian children – namely those from the occupied territories – on the basis of age, national identity, place of residence, and belonging to a particularly vulnerable category (orphans, children deprived of parental care, children with disabilities, children from

families in difficult life circumstances due to Russian aggression).

The transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus, which aims to politically indoctrinate and militarize them, is part of Russia's large-scale attack on Ukrainian national identity in the occupied territories Ukraine. This attack, targeting both adults and children, is accompanied by the imposition of Russian citizenship, imposition of Russian curriculum in schools, intimidation, enforced disappearances, persecution of civilians disloyal to the occupying state, deportations, and displacement.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, the reeducation of Ukrainian children taken to Belarus has resulted in the violation of a number of fundamental rights and freedoms of the child (to identity, humane treatment, education, culture, language, religion, freedom of thought, etc.), the combined negative effect of which amounts to discriminatory persecution as a crime against humanity.

Transfers of orphans and children deprived of parental care indicate the possibility of forcible transfer and deportation – war crimes under the Rome Statute. In addition, the prohibition on expression of Ukrainian identity and speaking the Ukrainian language and the political indoctrination and militarization of children's education may be considered evidence of Russian and Belarusian officials' actions to destroy in part the Ukrainian national group, which is protected under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948). As discussed in the original UN Sixth Committee debates on the Genocide Convention, forcibly transferring children to a group where they will receive an education different from that of their own group, with new customs, a new religion, and possibly a new language, is in practice equal to the destruction of their group, whose future depends on that generation of children. This is reflected in Article 6(e) on forcibly transferring children from one group to another as one of the defined acts of the crime of genocide in the Rome Statute and in the Article 2(e) of the Genocide Convention.¹⁵⁰

Considering the political indoctrination and militarization of Ukrainian children in Belarus through the prism of international crimes, one should consider the role of the state officials in the implementation of the unified policy of Russia to eliminate Ukrainian identity. As accomplices, individual Belarusians, if all the key elements are present, may also be responsible for a number of war crimes: deportation (Articles 8(2)(a)(vii) and 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute), attacks against civilians (Article 8(2)(b)(i) of the Rome

Statute), involvement of children in the activities of armed groups or forces of the opposing party (Article 8(2)(a)(v) of the Rome Statute), and ill-treatment (Article 8(2)(a)(ii)).¹⁵¹

The issue of consent

The issue of consent for displacing children to reeducation camps in Belarus requires careful examination. In some cases, parents or other legal representatives signed consent forms for their children to attend institutions presented exclusively as rehabilitation or vacation camps. These parents often sought to protect their children temporarily from the detrimental effects of hostilities, such as aerial shelling, food deprivation, and artillery fire, compounded by limited evacuation options in front-line areas. Parents generally stipulated even to propaganda media that consent was given only for a temporary stay and vacation, not for political indoctrination and militarization. With limited access to the occupied territories, it is challenging to determine whether each instance of consent was truly voluntary and informed, particularly given the parents' understanding of the program's content and its politicized components. Considering that, in other instances, the transfer of children to pro-Russian reeducation camps occurred under threats and duress, the validity of parental consent is questionable. The context of ongoing armed conflict, restricted access to information, and the deceptive nature of this displacement – often described as temporary “rest” periods – further undermines the legitimacy of parental consent.¹⁵²

Cases when parents knowingly consented to their children being politically indoctrinated and militarized in Belarusian camps raise serious concerns about whether such consent aligns with the best interests of the child. According to the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 17, while the CRC recognizes the vital role of parents in child-rearing, the state must intervene in situations where a child's best interests are compromised, particularly in cases of abuse or neglect.¹⁵³ In the context of deportation and discriminatory persecution, parental consent cannot legitimize actions that lead to the commission of international crimes against Ukrainian children.

Belarusian officials as an accomplice to international crimes

Representatives of Belarus and officials of the Union State do not commit international crimes

against Ukrainian children on their own. They act as accomplices to the main perpetrators: officials of Russia and the occupation administrations, who initiated the development and implementation of the policy of eliminating Ukrainian identity by reeducating young Ukrainians from occupied territories in a network of special institutions in Russia, Belarus, and occupied Crimea.

Aiding and abetting a principal perpetrator is a sufficient basis for criminal liability under Article 25(3)(C) of the Rome Statute. It expressly provides for a typical form of such complicity by providing the means to commit an international crime. The removal of Ukrainian children for political indoctrination and militarization in camps and other institutions in Belarus, and the organization of their movement and stay are sufficient “means” to have a significant impact on the realization of the purpose of discriminatory persecution of Ukrainian children, namely, to turn them into patriots of Russia and representatives of the “Russian world” ideology, which the Belarusian regime also promotes.

In addition, the actions of Belarusian agents constitute support and encouragement of the commission of the crime by the main perpetrators.¹⁵⁴ Representatives of Belarus and officials of the Union State have repeatedly taken the initiative to reeducate Ukrainian children, approved the relevant Russian policy, and spread Russian narratives among the deported children. For this, Belarusian agents were personally rewarded by Vladimir Putin, against whom the ICC issued an arrest warrant on March 17, 2023, for deporting Ukrainian children with the intention of leaving them under Russian control forever.¹⁵⁵

In light of the ICC charge against Putin and Lvova-Belova, Belarusian agents and representatives of the Union State acting as aiders and abettors are probably aware that their behavior is considered under international treaties to violate the fundamental rights and constitute crimes against Ukrainian children. It is highly likely that they are aware of the essential elements of these crimes, such as forcible displacement of Ukrainian and their re-education, which have been condemned by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament.¹⁵⁶ In addition, some of the accomplices have already been formally put on notice and are on sanctions lists for their activities related to the deportation and militarized reeducation of Ukrainian children.¹⁵⁷

Conclusions

The Belarusian regime is complicit in the Russian policy of displacement, indoctrination and militarization of Ukrainian children through the transfer of Ukrainian children from temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine to Belarus, starting in 2021, and perpetrating the Russian model of reeducation and militarization in the territory of Belarus. This is confirmed by several factors.

1. Evidence supports the conclusion that the Belarusian regime has copied the Russian government's systematic approach to displacing Ukrainian children with the goal of erasing their national identity. When analyzing cases of children deprived of parental care, researchers identified at least three among this group whose displacement to Belarus qualifies as deportation.
2. The system of education and "recreation" that Ukrainian children in Belarus are placed into is focused on spreading Russian propaganda narratives that aim to demonize certain nations, including Ukraine. Activities are conducted in Russian, and Ukrainian children are persistently identified as "Russians" or "citizens of Russia" within the system and in Belarusian and Russian state-owned media, as well as public communications by Belarusian GONGOs.
3. Along with reeducation, militarization of Ukrainian children is a clear goal of the displacement. Ukrainian children in Belarusian facilities are routinely subjected to content that promotes service in the Russian Armed Forces and glorifies the Soviet role in World War II, drawing parallels between that effort and the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine. Ukrainian children that have joined Russian militarized youth organizations in the occupied territories, while transferred to Belarus, also serve as propaganda actors themselves.
4. There are five categories of people who are complicit in the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children: Belarusian officials, Russian officials, officials of the Union State, occupying authorities in Ukraine, and Belarusian GONGO representatives.
 - a. Belarusian officials, both at the central and regional levels, authorize and support the policy, allocate budgetary funds for and ensure that children stay in state institutions, as well as study in local educational institutions and participate in propaganda "cultural" events.
 - b. Russian officials, apart from perpetrating the policy in Russia, support and endorse the engagement of the Belarusian regime in the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children in Belarus.
 - c. Officials of the Union State, composed of officials who also hold positions in the Belarusian and Russian regimes, authorize and finance the policy.
 - d. Occupying authorities in Ukraine ensure the recruitment of groups of Ukrainian children and the dissemination of propaganda about the displacement, reeducation, and militarization of those children.
 - e. Representatives of Belarusian GONGOs and foundations that initiate, organize, and campaign to finance the displacement and reeducation of Ukrainian children.
5. The role of Belarusian GONGOs and foundations cannot be understated. They operate at the behest of and are loyal to Belarusian state authorities and/or the Russian authorities, including in occupied Ukraine, and will not take actions that would contradict state policy. Moreover, their activities related to the displacement and indoctrination of Ukrainian children are widely supported by Belarusian government officials and/or the Russian and occupation authorities, and funded, among other things, by Belarus's state-affiliated enterprises, which link their activities to the state policy.
6. In view of this, the actions of the representatives of Belarus and the Union State demonstrate that they aid and abet Russia, the main perpetrator, in the form of providing the means to commit the crime, which is a sufficient basis for criminal liability.
7. The political indoctrination and militarization of Ukrainian children in Belarus violates fundamental rights and freedoms of the child, including the right to freedom of thought, the right to education, the right to assimilate one's culture, to practice one's religion and use one's language, and to be protected from interference with one's identity. In addition, the reeducation of Ukrainian children on the territory of Belarus, in the context of the Russian war against Ukraine, qualifies as discriminatory persecution, which is a crime against humanity.

Recommendations

It is imperative that the international community work together to address the coordinated, systematic effort by Belarusian and Russian authorities to displace, reeducate, and militarize Ukrainian children. The atrocities against Ukrainian children enumerated in this report are further evidence of the Russian Federation's actions to eradicate Ukrainian national identity, with the Lukashenko regime's complicity as documented in this report. As such, Freedom House, ZMINA Human Rights Center, Regional Center for Human Rights, Viasna, and BELPOL make the following recommendations for foreign governments, the government of Ukraine, as well as international donors and civil society partners.

Foreign governments should:

- Seek accountability for the ongoing displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children from occupied regions of Ukraine by:
 - Urging the International Criminal Court (ICC) to open a preliminary examination into the Russian and Belarusian regimes' coordinated system of reeducation and militarization of Ukrainian children from occupied territory of Ukraine. State parties to the Rome Statute should refer the situation to the ICC, or the ICC's Office of the Prosecutor should independently (*proprio motu*) open an additional investigation, to collect further evidence of Belarusian and Russian authorities' efforts to destroy Ukrainian children's national identity. In accordance with such an investigation, **the ICC should issue arrest warrants for Aleksandr Lukashenko, Dmitriy Mezentsev, Mikhail Mishustin, and Aliaksei Talai**, for their role in the reeducation and militarization of Ukrainian children in addition to revising the arrest warrants already issued for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova. Governments should also support the ICC's investigations through intelligence and data sharing.
 - Imposing targeted sanctions against Russian and Belarusian individuals and entities specifically in response to their role in the displacement, indoctrination, and militarization

of Ukrainian children. These sanctions should be coordinated across democratic governments for maximum effectiveness. Governments should also partner with civil society partners to develop and maintain a comprehensive list of perpetrating individuals and entities, to include representatives of the Union State as well as Ukrainian collaborators in occupied territories of Ukraine. Where gaps in intelligence exist, further investigate the staffing structure and funding of the Union State as a mechanism of autocratic collaboration and the systematization of crimes against Ukrainian children. In the United States, Russian and Belarusian officials should be sanctioned under relevant mechanisms, including Section 7031(c) of the annual Appropriations Act and Section 212(a)(3)(c) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act.¹⁹⁸

- Harmonizing sectoral sanctions against Russia and Belarus, given the Lukashenko regime's complicity and participation in Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine. As the European Union did with the adoption of its 14th sanctions package against Russia in July 2024, governments should mitigate opportunities for either state to circumvent sanctions against Russia. Relatedly, Lukashenko should be prosecuted alongside Putin for the crime of aggression against Ukraine through a special international tribunal. Indeed, the displacement and reeducation of Ukrainian children only became possible due to the aggression of Russia against Ukraine.

The International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children should:

- Clarify its mandate and action items and:
 - Establish a regular cadence of meeting with international and Ukrainian civil society partners actively investigating this issue to facilitate information sharing and greater coordination.
 - Pool funding to support civil society and investigative journalists engaged in this area.

- Continue to publicly reaffirm the principles behind the fourth point of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Peace Formula, which calls for the release of all prisoners and deportees from Ukraine.
 - Accelerate efforts to expand upon the coalition's 40 member states to include additional governments in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. These efforts would increase global pressure on the Russian Federation and Belarus to return all displaced Ukrainian children. Specifically, the coalition should seek to engage the governments of Brazil, Namibia, the Republic of Korea, Uruguay, South Africa, Ethiopia, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia, Mauritius, Botswana, Rwanda, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, and India, as well as any other countries that have relevant experience addressing the consequences of political indoctrination and the militarization of children.
 - Engaging in further back-channel diplomacy with administrations who could be engaged as intermediaries in a mechanism to return Ukrainian children, including Turkey and Gulf countries that have previously supported prisoner exchanges, as well as the Vatican.
 - Recognize the political indoctrination and militarization of children as the seventh grave violation against children during armed conflict. Pending the implementation of an appropriate mechanism at the level of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, governments should encourage the UN Human Rights Council to establish a special rapporteur, independent expert, or working group to document these abuses and recommend actions.
 - Urge the Russian Federation to implement the recommendation of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to put an end to the politicization and militarization of schools as well as to prevent any attempt to rewrite school curricula and textbooks to reflect the political and military agenda of the current government.
- The government of Ukraine should:**
- Highlight the Russian and Belarusian regimes' systematic transfer of Ukrainian children—in particular, their specific goal of erasing their Ukrainian national identity through brainwashing, reeducation, and militarization—in diplomatic engagements and international forums. Such efforts would increase international pressure on the Russian and Belarusian regimes to return Ukrainian children.
 - Engage additional government members and support for the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children.
 - Together with international partners, pursue the establishment of a formal international mechanism, whether through the United Nations or another international body, to systematically return Ukrainian children. The commendable efforts of the Ukrainian authorities and CSOs are currently resulting in the return of a few hundred children per year, while many times more are being displaced by the actors specified in this report. An international mechanism is required to meet the scale of the problem.
 - Coordinate the intragovernmental response and communicate with external stakeholders such as relatives, civil society partners, media, and international governments through the work of the Bring Kids Back initiative and other bodies. Additionally, the Ukrainian government should:
 - Consult with civil society on the development of, or approval of existing, reliable and secure databases for all reported cases of deported Ukrainian children in partnership with Ukrainian civil society, local authorities, and media.
 - More proactively seek information from the Ukrainian public on cases of missing children and raise awareness of existing reporting structures.
 - Leverage evidence collected with nongovernmental partners and open criminal cases through the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office against Ukrainian collaborators from the occupied territories who are involved in displacing, reeducating, and militarizing Ukrainian children with Belarus.
 - Consistently communicate that legal consent, as it relates to the displacement of Ukrainian parentless children or children in orphanages in occupied territories, can only be given by the national authorities of Ukraine.

- Work with civil society and relevant international donors to provide training on working with minors and victims of violent crime for the branches of government and law enforcement who will interface with returned Ukrainian children, such as the State Border Guards.
- In partnership with Ukrainian civil society, local communities, and donors, continue to develop a system of rehabilitation and reintegration for returned Ukrainian children. This system should take into account the impact of reeducation and militarization. Ukrainian authorities should engage partners to provide the affected children with all necessary humanitarian, medical, psychological assistance, and unbiased educational resources, with the goal of restoring their health and well-being. To the extent possible, the Ukrainian government should also unite Ukrainian children with families or place them in family-based care settings.
- Intensify cooperation with Ukrainian civil society on efforts to prevent the displacement of Ukrainian children. Such efforts would include the Ukrainian government's current attempts to evacuate children from at-risk regions, digitizing the records of children residing in children's institutions, and supporting programs aimed at bringing families from the temporarily occupied territories to Ukrainian government-controlled territories.

International donors and civil society should:

- Support Ukrainian civil society and like-minded partners to expand the coalitions working to investigate, return, and rehabilitate Ukrainian children as well as hold perpetrators accountable.

The following specific interventions are recommended:

- Dedicate additional resources to examining the role of the Russian and Belarusian regimes, as well as of the Union State, in the systematic displacement, reeducation, and militarization of Ukrainian children. This effort would require comprehensive stakeholder mapping to ensure the most efficient use of funds. Such efforts should focus on the interactions and direct linkages between Russian and Belarusian authorities in this regard.
- Increase engagement between Ukrainian civil society and stakeholders in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Such efforts would raise greater awareness of this issue and recruit additional state parties to the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children and generate additional pressure on the Russian Federation and Belarus to return Ukrainian children.
- Support the creation of global awareness-raising campaigns to put pressure on the offending governments.
- In coordination with the government of Ukraine and local communities, support the continued development and institutionalization of a system to rehabilitate and reintegrate returned children. This system could draw lessons learned and experience from countries that have implemented disarmament, demobilization, deradicalization, and reintegration (DDR) programs for child soldiers, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire. It could also draw on lessons learned from groups in Central and South America, such as Argentina, who have worked on establishing the identities, tracing blood relatives, and establishing court custody of children taken from their families.

Endnotes

- ¹ The report authors have chosen to use the Russian transliteration to reflect the way in which Lukashenko himself spells his name in official documents.
- ² <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule129>
- ³ https://ZMINA.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/01/deportation_ukr.pdf
- ⁴ Azarov, Derys, Dmytro Koval, Gaiane Nuridzhanian, and Volodymyr Venher (2023), "Understanding Russia's Actions in Ukraine as the Crime of Genocide," *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 21, 2: 233-264. <https://newlinesinstitute.org/genocide/the-russian-federations-escalating-commission-of-genocide-in-ukraine-a-legal-analysis/>
- ⁵ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/OHCHR_BerkeleyProtocol.pdf
- ⁶ <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/podpisano-rasporjazyhenie-ob-organizacii-otdyha-i-ozdorovleniya-gruppy-detej-iz-doneckoy-oblasti-v-belorusskom-zubrenke>
- ⁷ <https://newlinesinstitute.org/genocide/the-russian-federations-escalating-commission-of-genocide-in-ukraine-a-legal-analysis/>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/02/kherson-torture-centres-were-planned-by-russian-state-say-lawyers>; <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/report-independent-international-commission-inquiry-ukraine-ahrc5262enruuk-advance-unedited-version>
- ⁸ <https://beta.by/society/view/deti-donbassa-kotorye-poluchili-minno-vzryvnye-raneniya-priehali-na-ozdorovlenie-v-belarus-633175-2024/>; <https://sputnik.by/20230719/detstvo-kotorigo-net-kak-vzrosleyut-deti-donbassa-1077646402.html>; <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/poseshchenie-nacionalnogo-aeroporta-minsk-i-minskogo-zavoda-grazhdanskoy-svachii-no407>
- ⁹ https://vk.com/wall-195920155_3489
- ¹⁰ <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/podpisano-rasporjazyhenie-ob-organizacii-otdyha-i-ozdorovleniya-gruppy-detej-iz-doneckoy-oblasti-v-belorusskom-zubrenke>
- ¹¹ <https://youtu.be/ngVu14-ag0g>
- ¹² "Forcible transfer and deportation of children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine to the Russian Federation". Human Rights Information Centre ZMINA, April 2023. https://ZMINA.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/children_web_ukr.pdf
- ¹³ <https://news.zerkalo.io/file/37901.html>; <https://archive.ph/gMl6t>
- ¹⁴ <https://sputnik.by/20220930/v-santimetre-ot-sonnoy-arterii-deti-donbassa-o-ranenyakh-i-mechtakh-o-mire-1067406444.html>
- ¹⁵ <https://t.me/ontnews/91916>; https://t.me/alexej_talaj/2117; <https://t.me/ontnews/92669>
- ¹⁶ The Cadet Corps is an elementary school with full board and military training. In the TOTS of Ukraine, Russia has organized both training in cadet corps and cadet classes, a military training program in general education institutions; Closed sources.
- ¹⁷ Closed sources; <https://sputnik.by/20221013/ocherednaya-gruppa-detej-iz-donbassa-pribyla-v-belarus--video-1067946881.html>
- ¹⁸ https://www.belta.by/regions/view/talaj-na-vstreche-s-detmi-iz-donbassa-vel-belorusy-ochen-perezivajut-za-vas-540102_2022/; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjpxzWQLts>
- ¹⁹ https://t.me/belarusian_silovik/8380
- ²⁰ <https://sputnik.by/20230410/vzryvy-snaryadov--eto-norma-chto-govoryat-i-o-chem-mechtayut-deti-donbassa-1074219178.html>
- ²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORR0hTYFH4>
- ²² <https://t.me/minskctvby/16597>; <https://t.me/sputnikby/66603>
- ²³ <https://t.me/sputnikby/66603>
- ²⁴ https://t.me/tv_zvyazda/12910; https://t.me/tv_zvyazda/13171
- ²⁵ <https://www.belta.by/society/view/smenit-obstanovku-otdohnut-i-zarjaditsja-emotsijami-detej-iz-donbassa-vstretit-v-breestkoj-oblasti-597184-2023/>
- ²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7EPgXuo3M>; <https://beta.by/society/view/my-spokojno-spali-priemnaja-mama-s-donbassa-rasskazala-kak-oni-s-detmi-otdohnuili-v-belarusi-599524-2023/>
- ²⁷ <https://beta.by/society/view/okunutsja-v-rozhdestvenskuju-skazku-na-ozdorovlenie-v-belarus-priehali-deti-donbassa-606687-2023/>
- ²⁸ <https://beta.by/society/view/talaj-dobrye-dela-formirujut-nashe-prostranstvo-i-budushee-608351-2024/>
- ²⁹ https://news.gomel.by/archive_news/society/v-gomele-vstretit-rebyat-iz-khersonskoy-oblasti-vpervye-priekhavshikh-v-belarus_169636.html
- ³⁰ <https://t.me/depobherson/5641>
- ³¹ <https://www.sb.by/articles/v-gomele-teplo-vstretit-rebyat-iz-donbassa-pribyvshikh-v-belarus-na-ozdorovlenie.html>
- ³² <https://souz.by/tpost/uvslkxm11-molodezh-melitoplya-posetila-gorod-mins>
- ³³ <https://youtu.be/KjpxzWQLts>; https://t.me/tv_zvyazda/13171
- ³⁴ "The Genocide of the Belarusian people" law was adapted by the Belarusian regime in 2022 and seeks to punish those who deny the regime defined atrocities committed by the Nazis, their collaborators, and national movements of surrounding nations on the territory of present-day Belarus from 1941 to 1951. A course of the same name was introduced in Belarusian schools, covering the atrocities described in the law. <https://adu.by/images/2023/10/Genocid-bel-naroda-1-4-klass.pdf>; <https://humanconstants.org/en/on-the-genocide-of-belarusian-people-legal-overview-of-the-new-law/>; "A letter of the Ministry of Education of Belarus. <https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vSnaKcYQkMePUnkRI-74CzWYqTjPXLX00Vegstg9jWUzQ0C3Eyzj39zgj/pub>; https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f-mjSkj_AyoD5iHt_A_XOfjgWpZqFw8View
- ³⁵ <https://t.me/OstashkoNews/126013>
- ³⁶ <https://sputnik.by/20221014/shvayba-deti-iz-donbassa-mogut-poluchit-obrazovanie-v-belarusi-1067959141.html>; https://t.me/alexej_talaj/2163
- ³⁷ <https://t.me/belaruskall/12644>
- ³⁸ <https://youtu.be/ZB6tcoll4xM?l=1568>
- ³⁹ https://t.me/bondareva_bez_kupjuri/18998
- ⁴⁰ <https://t.me/delfin/2022/684>; <https://gp.by/novosti/obshchestvo/news285709.html>
- ⁴¹ "Great Patriotic War narrative" claims that World War II started only in 1941 instead of 1939, disregarding the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact which included protocols related to the territorial division of Europe between the Nazi and Soviet regimes. It also refers to the idea that Russia played an exceptional role in the defense of the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany. This includes the sanctification of those who died during the war. In today's Russia, the Kremlin exploits the memory of the war to foster youth militarization as well as to justify Russian aggression against Ukraine by claiming that such aggression is "de-Nazification."
- ⁴² <https://youtu.be/Co-Z97Hm1do?l=1129>
- ⁴³ <https://t.me/ontnews/113743>; <https://youtu.be/mM8Z00DLwFo>
- ⁴⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1X_spjBQ-JY8t=415s
- ⁴⁵ <https://youtu.be/KjpxzWQLts>; <https://sputnik.by/20220930/v-santimetre-ot-sonnoy-arterii-deti-donbassa-o-ranenyakh-i-mechtakh-o-mire-1067406444.html>
- ⁴⁶ https://www.ombudsman.gov.ua/storage/app/media/uploaded-files/Спеціальна_донорада_на_тему_ПЕРЕГОПЛЕНІ_пдф?fbclid=IwY2xjawEF-rxeHRuA2FIBQkMAABHRaE1AE1PUCjMcXt0TCv0H3-E6aCJvew5mJzYUFAJebnM0ahWkH07pA_aem_0xXrB0g2Ocy4Ugmr171QQ
- ⁴⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-60658477>; <https://www.sb.by/articles/v-sanatori-volma-v-chervenskom-rayone-prokhodyat-reabilitatsiyu-30-chelovek-iz-donetskoi-mariupolya.html>
- ⁴⁸ <https://t.me/belaruskall/12644>

- ⁴⁸ https://t.me/cpk_mdby/688
- ⁴⁹ https://t.me/police_minsk/7906; <https://t.me/pressmvd/6348>
- ⁵⁰ https://t.me/vtf_besut/7250
- ⁵¹ https://t.me/alexey_talai/2564
- ⁵² Oleksandr Zakharchenko was the 'head of state' and 'Prime Minister' of the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" in 2014-2018.
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- ⁵⁴ <https://ukraina.ru/20220626/1034231877.html>
- ⁵⁵ <https://archive.ph/sqMwd>; <https://archive.ph/Plizin>; <https://archive.ph/UoC47>; <https://archive.ph/Yo1Ra>; <https://archive.ph/6SNKI>; <https://archive.ph/Z9Rk6>; <https://archive.ph/vTfSK>; <https://archive.ph/n7EFO>; <https://archive.ph/HT48d#selection-1479.0-1479.15>
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 54
- ⁵⁷ https://t.me/kadety_donetsk/518; https://t.me/kadety_donetsk/527
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 54
- ⁵⁹ Article 51 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/geneva-convention-relative-protection-civilian-persons-time-war>
- ⁶⁰ Originally introduced to symbolize the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany, Ribbons of St. George became a symbol of Russian nationalism and support for Putin. Since 2014, the ribbons are also associated with the support of Russia's war in Ukraine and Putin's false claims of Nazis in Ukraine. https://t.me/kadety_donetsk/45; <https://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/7640>; https://t.me/kadety_donetsk/579; <https://paodkb.org/events/19-aprelya-den-pamyati-ogenotsida>; https://t.me/kadety_donetsk/33
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OPENING PREPARED STATEMENT OF BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Thank you to Chairman Wilson for organizing this hearing.

In 2020, as Lukashenka ordered a violent crackdown against the massive protests that erupted over the rigged Presidential election, the Kremlin gave Lukashenka a 1.5-billion-dollar lifeline. Were it not for Vladimir Putin's support, Alyaksandr Lukashenka could not sustain himself as the dictator of Belarus today.

This dependence has not always been the case. Just a few years ago it was Lukashenka who was teaching Putin new techniques of repression. The number of political prisoners in Belarus still exceeds those in Russia and unfortunately has served as a model for Putin to emulate.

With Putin exercising nearly total control over Belarus, however,

Belarus is a co-belligerent in Russia's war against Ukraine. In particular, Belarus's facilitation of the forced relocation and "re-education" of Ukrainian children, abducting them and teaching them to disown and hate their home country.

That is why I believe that the United States and our partners must continue to impose sanctions against Belarus as well as Russia because practically they are functioning as a single belligerent in this war.

This alliance is not only a threat to Ukraine and to all our allies in the region whose borders with Russia and Belarus. Russia's de facto annexation also hurts innocent Belarussian citizens.

As we mark International Human Rights Day on December 10, we need to remember the victims of this Belarussian dictatorship. Belarussians threatened by transnational repression abroad. The family members of those forced into exile who are still tormented by the Belarussian security forces, and the over one thousand political prisoners, that suffer in Lukashenka's prisons.

I look forward to learning more from our panelists about how we can do more to combat this tyranny and hold dictators and their accomplices accountable for their crimes.

Thank you.





The United States Helsinki Commission, an independent federal agency, by law monitors and encourages progress in implementing provisions of the Helsinki Accords.

The Commission, Created in 1976, is composed of nine Senators, nine Representatives and one official each from the Department of State, Defense and Commerce.

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