

# BELARUS AFTER A POTENTIAL PEACE SETTLEMENT IN UKRAINE:

scenarios, risks and opportunities for the EU

Short version

Yan Auseyushkin  
Lev Lvovskiy  
Artyom Shraibman



Co-funded by  
the European Union

## ABOUT AUTHORS



### YAN AUSEYUSHKIN

Yan Auseyushkin is a Senior Analyst at iSANS, a Warsaw-based think-tank focused on Eastern European security. With a background in investigative journalism, he researches Russian influence operations, disinformation, and hybrid threats in Belarus and the wider region.



### LEV LVOVSKIY

Lev Lvovskiy, PhD, is a Belarusian economist and Academic Director of the BEROC Economic Research Center. His research focuses on Macroeconomics, Labour Economics, and Gender Economics, with particular attention to labour market dynamics, and demographic trends in Belarus and the broader region. In addition to his research work, Lvovskiy teaches in academic and professional programs and regularly contributes to public discussions, offering expert commentary on economic policy, structural reforms, and socio-economic challenges in Belarus.



### ARTYOM SHRAIBMAN

Artyom Shraibman is a Belarusian political analyst and founder of Sense Analytics consultancy. He is also a non-resident scholar of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center. He worked as a political correspondent for the BelaPAN news agency from 2013 to 2014, as a political editor for TUT.BY from 2014 to 2019.

## CONTENTS

About authors .....	2
1. Scenarios for 2026.....	3
2. Implications of the scenarios for Belarus .....	4
3. EU policy towards Belarus: minimising risks and exploiting opportunities.....	7
3.1. Risks .....	7
3.2. Opportunities and recommendations.....	8

### 1. SCENARIOS FOR 2026

The paper does not attempt to predict the future, but to outline realistic consequences for Belarus depending on how Russia's war against Ukraine evolves in 2026. The time horizon is limited to one year after the onset of each scenario. For Belarus, the decisive question is not only whether the war continues or ends, but also what kind of regional environment follows a possible peace settlement. Belarus enters this period with limited agency in security matters and deep economic and political dependence on Russia. At the same time, the interests of Minsk and of Belarusian society do not fully coincide with Russia's, which means Belarusian agency should not be treated as having disappeared altogether. Three scenarios are considered.

**“The status quo”** is the baseline scenario. It assumes that hostilities continue through 2026 with a slowly shifting or largely frozen front line. Kyiv, Washington, and Moscow remain unable to bridge disagreements over territorial demarcation, security guarantees for Ukraine, the future of sanctions, etc. Russia continues its slow offensive, concentrating on the Donbas, while Ukraine remains under pressure from manpower shortages and unstable supplies. Washington continues to provide intelligence and weapons paid for by European allies, but its attention is increasingly consumed by domestic politics. The EU largely maintains unity and adopts further sanctions packages, with a focus on enforcement and Russia's shadow fleet.

**“A balanced deal”** is the most favourable among realistic settlement scenarios for Ukraine and its allies, although it still requires some Ukrainian concessions. It becomes possible once Moscow concludes that continuing the war carries greater risks than opportunities. This would require a combination of slowing Russian advances, worsening economic pressure, continuing Western support for Ukraine, and more effective Ukrainian long-range strikes resulting in greater disruption to Russian oil exports and military-industrial capacity. In this scenario, a ceasefire is reached in late 2026. Russia agrees to freeze the line of contact. Ukraine accepts minor constitutional changes removing the aspiration to join NATO and introducing symbolic provisions on minority rights, while receiving security guarantees analogous to Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, enshrined in US law, and access to an international reconstruction fund. The EU and the United Kingdom support the ceasefire but avoid firm commitments to lift sanctions rapidly.

## 2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE SCENARIOS FOR BELARUS

---

“A Ukraine-adverse deal” assumes that negative battlefield trends accelerate in summer 2026. Russia advances in the Donbas and towards Zaporizhzhia and the city of Dnipro, while Ukraine faces a critical shortage of air defence assets. The United States, focused on its own stockpiles and eager to secure a deal before the midterm elections, pressures Kyiv to accept Russian terms. Ukraine agrees to withdraw from the remaining parts of the Donbas under its control, hold elections in early 2027, accept neutrality, cap the size of its armed forces, and provide legal guarantees for Russian-speaking citizens and the Russian Orthodox Church. The US recognises Crimea as Russian and lifts most post-2022 sanctions. The EU, after a difficult internal debate, suspends energy and financial sanctions against Russia to prevent further Ukrainian collapse. The result is not Ukraine’s full capitulation, but it is a ceasefire on terms close to Moscow’s preferences.

## 2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE SCENARIOS FOR BELARUS

The principal differences between the scenarios concern Belarus’s relations with the West, the sanctions environment, the scale of Russia’s military use of Belarusian territory, and the prospects for any limited reduction in repression. Relations with Ukraine remain poor in all three scenarios, but the level of hostility and the space for technical contacts vary.

**Under the status quo**, Belarus remains locked into its current role as Russia’s military-economic rear, and continues to be treated as such by the EU. Since most significant EU restrictive measures have already been introduced, the emphasis shifts from new sanctions to enforcement: dual-use goods, microelectronics, industrial equipment, defence-industrial supply chains, luxury goods, and circumvention networks. The United States remains the only Western track where Minsk may see limited progress. Washington may continue to use a selective and transactional approach to encourage humanitarian and diplomatic concessions: above all, the release of political prisoners and the restoration of diplomatic relations. Defence-related sanctions and controls on dual-use goods would remain outside such normalisation. Minsk would try to use any opening to restore economic ties while continuing to provide cautious assistance to Russia in circumventing sanctions.

Russia’s military presence in Belarus will remain broadly at the current level, including air defence facilities in southern Belarus, communications infrastructure, and preparations linked to the Oreshnik hypersonic systems. Rhetoric about nuclear weapons in Belarus will primarily serve as an instrument

## 2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE SCENARIOS FOR BELARUS

---

of Russian deterrence and bargaining vis-à-vis the West. Minsk has little incentive to escalate this issue on its own, but little ability to prevent Moscow from using it.

Relations with Ukraine will remain almost frozen, including in the economic domain. Kyiv views Lukashenka as an accomplice in Russian aggression and is unlikely to support easing US sanctions towards Minsk. Contacts continue only through diplomatic and security channels.

Domestically, the status quo gives the regime no strong reason to soften repression. If dialogue with Washington advances, Minsk may introduce an informal pause on new politically motivated prison sentences, but would likely compensate for this by resorting to administrative persecution, fines, dismissals, pressure on relatives, and other non-custodial measures. The repressive atmosphere and ideological indoctrination policies would remain intact.

**Under a balanced deal**, Belarus does not escape Russia's orbit, but incentives for more engagement with the West strengthen considerably. The EU has no reason to rush into normalisation, since Russia has not won the war. Core sanctions against Belarus – potash, petroleum products, finance, transport and large-scale industrial cooperation – remain in place. Yet the end of active hostilities creates room for limited trade recovery through European firms and intermediaries, and for practical discussions on border crossings, rail links, and sectoral contacts. This scenario gives Minsk the strongest incentives to make concessions. If political prisoners remain in Belarus at the end of 2026, Lukashenka may release the last of them in 2027 to remove the most visible obstacle in relations with the West. Minsk would also likely stop cross-border provocations, including the migration crisis, because escalation would no longer be a plausible way to force dialogue. Belarusian diplomacy would intensify efforts to understand what the EU wants and what limited steps could soften European policy.

The United States may continue selective sanctions easing and move towards restoring its full diplomatic presence, including an ambassador, provided the political prisoner issue is resolved. The economic effect would be modest but symbolically important. Some access to intermediate goods, industrial components, electronics and equipment could improve, though dual-use concerns would keep easing limited.

Russia's conventional military presence would probably not expand. Some units, such as air defence assets in the Homel region, could even be redeployed elsewhere. Institutional military dependence remains unchanged, but the incentive for deeper integration weakens. At the same time, the issues of nuclear

## 2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE SCENARIOS FOR BELARUS

---

weapons and Oreshnik systems may become more salient in negotiations over a future European security architecture. Moscow may use deployment or strategic ambiguity in Belarus as leverage.

Relations with Ukraine remain poor but somewhat less rigid. Kyiv still sees Belarus as a Russian ally and potential adversary, but a settlement on terms relatively favourable to Ukraine may make Kyiv more tolerant of narrow, externally brokered arrangements involving Belarus. Additional crossing points could reopen for humanitarian purposes or specific logistical operations. Limited transit arrangements may reappear. Full trade restoration and Belarusian participation in Ukraine's reconstruction remain highly unlikely.

Repression could ease more visibly than in the other scenarios, but not fundamentally. Minsk may reduce politically motivated criminal sentences and repeal some especially controversial measures. These steps could bring real relief to some people, but concerns about regime stability would prevent a deep thaw. Repression would become less visible rather than disappear.

**Under a Ukraine-adverse deal**, Belarus may become even more deeply embedded in Russia's security strategy. US sanctions relief and partial EU concessions to Russia would likely entail significant sanctions easing for Belarus as part of the same package. Minsk would benefit without making corresponding concessions of its own. This will reduce EU leverage and encourage Minsk to circumvent sanctions through third countries, intermediaries, and weaker enforcement. This is also the scenario most likely to split the EU. Some member states would argue for restoring pragmatic cooperation with Russia and Belarus in logistics, fertilisers, machinery, chemicals and other economically important sectors. Poland, the Baltic and Nordic states, and the United Kingdom would argue that Russia has become more dangerous and that Belarus remains a Russian satellite and threat platform. Minsk would exploit these divisions, seeking bilateral openings with countries most willing to re-engage, while portraying Poland and the Baltic states as destructive hardliners.

Russia's military presence in Belarus could increase substantially. Moscow could redeploy units from the frozen line of contact in Ukraine to Belarus under the pretext of re-equipment and training. Continuous exercises near Belarus's western border would put NATO's eastern flank under pressure. Russia could also use the situation to justify the actual deployment of nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory. Defence-industrial cooperation would gain from sanctions relief and Russia's accelerated military rebuilding.

Relations with Ukraine would be even more hostile than under the status quo. A militarised Belarus with an entrenched Russian presence would be seen as a long-term existential threat. The Belarus-Ukraine border would be fortified to a level comparable to that of the Russian border. Political contacts would be almost unimaginable, and economic engagement – politically toxic.

Domestically, this is the bleakest scenario. Minsk would view the West as the losing side and would have little reason to reduce repression. Even if political prisoners are released as part of a US-linked “gesture of goodwill”, this may be a one-off move followed by renewed arrests. The regime’s main argument to the West would not be political liberalisation, but a changed security environment and the need for dialogue with yesterday’s adversary.

## 3. EU POLICY TOWARDS BELARUS: MINIMISING RISKS AND EXPLOITING OPPORTUNITIES

### 3.1. Risks

The most serious risk is the use of Belarusian territory for **military and hybrid threats**. It exists in all scenarios because Russia has broad practical freedom to use Belarusian infrastructure. It becomes most acute under a Ukraine-adverse deal, where Moscow emerges with a sense of victory, its resources recover faster, and the West is divided. Escalation could range from facilitating irregular migration, cyber operations, disinformation and sabotage to more dangerous attempts to test NATO’s Article 5 through limited military operations or strikes against critical infrastructure. Belarus would probably again serve as a staging ground, while Minsk’s realistic maximum would be to provide early warning to neighbours and to avoid direct participation by Belarusian troops.

The second major risk is the **erosion of Belarusian sovereignty**. The status quo and especially the Ukraine-adverse deal would further entrench Belarus in Russia’s sphere of influence, deepen Russification, and weaken ties between Belarusians and Europe. Continued restrictions on mobility, whether because the war continues or because Poland and the Baltic states expect renewed conflict, would push Belarusian business, travel and education further eastward.

A third risk is **fragmentation of the Western position**. US-Belarus dialogue has already weakened transatlantic unity on Minsk. When the war ends, divisions inside the EU may grow. In a balanced deal scenario, the debate would focus on whether Minsk’s signals of openness are sincere and whether EU expectations should be lowered to seize the window

### 3. EU POLICY TOWARDS BELARUS

---

of opportunity. In a Ukraine–adverse deal scenario, some EU members would call for a reset with Russia and Belarus. Others, especially Belarus’s immediate neighbours, would argue that détente with Belarus is incompatible with preparing NATO’s eastern flank for a more dangerous Russia. Populist actors inside EU member states could also use the issue to attack mainstream containment policy.

Fourthly, **reduced sanctions leverage** is especially likely under the Ukraine–adverse deal scenario. If EU concessions to Russia are needed to secure a ceasefire, analogous sanctions against Belarus may be eased automatically. Lukashenka would receive relief without meeting EU conditions. Under a balanced deal scenario, if the US manages to broker some limited Belarus–Ukraine logistical cooperation, it could weaken the practical effect of EU sanctions.

The **crisis of values-based policy** is another risk. If the war ends on terms close to Moscow’s positions, arguments based on human rights and democracy will carry less force in a securitised and fragmented Europe. Political prisoners may remain on the agenda, but broader repression and the human rights crisis in Belarus could become less salient.

Even where sanctions formally remain in place, **enforcement** may weaken after a peace settlement. If US sanctions are softened, EU restrictions that depend on coordination in export controls, financial oversight, and pressure on intermediaries will become more vulnerable. For Belarus this would mean renewed access to sensitive imports; for European security, it would accelerate Russia’s military rebuilding and consolidate Belarus as one of its hubs.

Finally, **growing securitisation** may worsen the position of Belarusians in the EU. Under a status quo and especially a Ukraine–adverse deal scenario, legalisation procedures, mobility and the rights of relocated Belarusians may become more restricted. This would weaken pro-European sentiment, play into the hands of Belarusian propaganda, and deepen disillusionment among the Belarusian diaspora about the EU.

## 3.2. Opportunities and recommendations

### **Opportunity 1. Reducing Russia’s military presence in Belarus and the threats emanating from its territory**

Reducing Russia’s military presence in Belarus should remain a long-term EU priority, especially for Belarus’s neighbours. Russian troops, facilities, nuclear assets and missile systems in Belarus are not only military threats; they are also foreign-policy anchors that limit any future Belarusian turn towards Europe. A balanced deal would provide the best opening to address this, because Russia would not have won on its own terms and the West and Ukraine would retain some leverage. Even in worse scenarios, deterrence and channels for crisis communication remain necessary.

### 3. EU POLICY TOWARDS BELARUS

---

The EU and NATO should strengthen defence capabilities on the eastern flank, using Ukraine's experience, particularly in drone warfare. Any growth in the Russian presence in Belarus should be met with symmetric measures, including allied deployments where needed.

If post-ceasefire talks move towards a broader security architecture, the EU should seek to reduce Russia's presence in Belarus to pre-2021 levels and establish mechanisms to monitor it. This could involve more European military attachés in Minsk with carefully designed inspection rights, or an international monitoring mission. Its mandate could cover all Belarusian territory or focus on border regions with Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic states and Russia. On nuclear weapons and Oreshnik systems, the EU should demand either withdrawal or international control. Verifiable and lasting reductions should be rewarded through diplomatic engagement and, where appropriate, reversible sanctions easing. Military hotlines with Minsk should also be established to prevent unintended escalation and enable early warning from those parts of the Belarusian regime that wish to avoid being dragged into a new war.

#### **Opportunity 2. A peace settlement as a window for greater diplomatic flexibility**

A peace settlement would not automatically justify normalisation with Minsk, but it would give the EU more room to engage in active diplomacy. This is especially true in the balanced deal scenario. Sanctions introduced after February 2022 but not directly linked to war-related industries could become bargaining tools on repression, political prisoners, hybrid activity and border stabilisation. The EU should prepare an inventory of remaining barriers in relations with Belarus and of the leverage it still holds after a settlement. This should be followed by clear conditionality for step-by-step engagement. Given the history of broken promises by the Lukashenka regime, any easing should include snapback mechanisms to restore restrictive measures if Minsk fails to meet its commitments.

If the EU cannot coordinate Belarus policy with the United States, it should at least minimise Minsk's ability to play Brussels and Washington against each other. On political relations and sanctions, the EU should remain more values-based than Washington, tying concessions to verifiable steps such as reducing repression. The EU should also consider appointing a Special Representative for Belarus with sufficiently high status to coordinate member states, communicate with Washington, and conduct negotiations with Minsk. Such a role could help maintain a coherent EU position while lowering the reputational burden on senior EU officials and national leaders who may be reluctant to engage directly with Lukashenka.

#### **Opportunity 3. Restoring Belarusians' lost connections with Europe**

Since 2020, Belarusian society's links with Europe have been weakened by COVID-19, reductions in embassy staff, the migration crisis, visa restrictions, border closures, and Minsk's complicity in the war. The result has been a sharp decline in the number of Schengen visas issued and in travel to the EU. This isolation benefits both the Kremlin and the Lukashenka regime. It weakens pro-European sentiment, especially among younger and more mobile Belarusians, and reduces the long-term prospects for democratic change.

The EU should treat restored consular capacity in Belarus not as a concession to Minsk but as an investment in Belarusian society. Asking Minsk to lift restrictions on European diplomatic and consular staff should be one of the first practical items in post-ceasefire dialogue. European consulates in Minsk should issue more long-term, multi-entry visas to eligible applicants with clean visa histories. Belarus's western neighbours should also consider reopening selected border crossings and restoring passenger rail links where security conditions allow. At a later stage, the EU and Minsk could develop a step-by-step algorithm for confidence-building measures in civil aviation, allowing gradual restoration of air connectivity. Such measures would not require political normalisation with the regime. Their purpose, however, should be clear: to prevent Belarusian society from being pushed irreversibly into Russia's social, educational and economic space.

**Published by:** Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung  
Belarus country office  
Lvivo g. 25, LT-09320 Vilnius, Lithuania  
info.belarus@kas.de  
www.kas.de/belarus

**May, 2026**

This paper is co-supported within the framework of the EU-funded project  
“Strengthening Independent Belarusian Social, Political, and Economic Research”.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily  
reflect those of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung or the EU.

The full version  
of the paper  
can be found at  
[kas.de/belarus](https://www.kas.de/belarus)



