

Forum: Special Conference (SPECON) on Rediscovering Diplomacy in an Era of Political Instability

Issue: Promoting electoral confidence and democratic participation in Belarus

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TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Belarus is widely regarded as an authoritarian state in which political power is highly centralized and democratic institutions are significantly constrained.¹ Elections have been consistently criticized by international observers for failing to meet accepted standards for transparency, competitiveness, and fairness, while political opposition, independent media, and civil society organizations face substantial restrictions.²

Belarusian government security forces have been widely documented by international human rights organizations as using excessive force, arbitrary detention, and politically motivated prosecutions against journalists, opposition activists, peaceful protesters, and other individuals critical of the government.³ The courts and other state institutions are not independent and do little to limit the power of President Alexander Lukashenko.⁴

International and Belarusian human rights organizations reported a continued deterioration of human rights conditions throughout 2024.⁵ More specifically, despite the release of 227 political prisoners in 2024, many were forced to admit guilt. By the end of the year, at

¹ Freedom House. "Belarus." Freedomhouse.Org, 2013, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

² "Belarus: Freedom in the World 2025 Country Report | Freedom House." Freedom House, 2024, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2025>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

³ "World Report 2025: Rights Trends in Belarus." *Human Rights Watch*, 6 Jan. 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/belarus>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

⁴ "Belarus: Freedom in the World 2025 Country Report | Freedom House." Freedom House, 2024, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2025>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

⁵ "World Report 2025: Rights Trends in Belarus." *Human Rights Watch*, 6 Jan. 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/belarus>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

least 1,275 people remained imprisoned on political motives charges. In March, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that it had identified “reasonable grounds to believe” that Belarusian officials, while violating basic human rights, may have committed a crime against humanity.⁶

Given the ongoing situation in Belarus, electoral confidence is essential to ensure that citizens trust elections to be free and fair. Allegations of electoral fraud, restrictions on opposition candidates, and the suppression of political dissent have weakened public trust in elections and democratic institutions, leading many to question the government’s legitimacy and reducing political participation.

Regarding the other aspect of the issue, democratic participation is vital because it allows citizens to participate in the processes of the government, hold leaders accountable, and protect fundamental rights and freedoms. It is a fact that political restrictions limit civil liberties, free elections, public participation, and concentrate power in the hands of the government. A strong democracy can ensure that political authority reflects the will of the people and that individuals’ rights are respected.

Taking all these facts into consideration, the situation in Belarus raises significant concerns regarding the integrity of electoral processes, political participation, and the protection of fundamental rights. Allegations of electoral fraud, restrictions on opposition parties, limitations on independent media, and the treatment of political activists continue to shape the country’s political landscape.⁷ These issues raise important questions about how genuine electoral confidence can be established, how citizens’ trust in democratic institutions can be restored, and what role the international community should play in supporting free and fair elections while respecting state sovereignty.⁸

The issue of promoting electoral confidence and democratic participation in Belarus is closely linked to the theme of this year’s conference, “Rediscovering Diplomacy in an Era of Political Instability.” Electoral challenges in Belarus have contributed to political tensions and strained international relations, highlighting the need for diplomatic dialogue, international cooperation, and support for democratic institutions to promote stability and trust.

⁶ “World Report 2025: Rights Trends in Belarus.” Human Rights Watch, 6 Jan. 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/belarus>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

⁷ ---. “Belarus.” Freedomhouse.Org, 2013, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

⁸ “World Report 2025: Rights Trends in Belarus.” Human Rights Watch, 6 Jan. 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/belarus>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Democratic Backsliding

“Democratic backsliding, a phenomenon sometimes characterized as an ‘erosion,’ is the process of declining integrity for democratic values or institutions in a political system.”⁹

The Golden Horden

The Golden Horden “was a sophisticated and administratively complex empire, which synthesized practices drawn from the Uyghurs, the Chinese, the Mongols, and diverse Turkic Islamic groups settled in the Volga and Caspian regions.”¹⁰

The Belarussian S.S.R.

The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), commonly referred to as the Byelorussian SSR or Soviet Byelorussia, was one of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union from 1922 until the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991. Its capital city was Minsk.

Electoral Integrity

The principle that elections are conducted freely, fairly, transparently, and in accordance with national laws and international democratic standards, ensuring that the results reflect the genuine will of the people.

The Global State of Democracy Framework

“The Global State of Democracy Framework is a completed framework, which was created by the International IDEA for the assessment and measurement of the quality of democracy globally.”¹¹

Hybrid Regimes

⁹ Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. “Democratic Backsliding.” [Www.Carnegiecouncil.Org, https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/explore-engage/key-terms/democratic-backsliding](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/explore-engage/key-terms/democratic-backsliding). Accessed 15 July 2026.

¹⁰The Golden Horde | Nomadic Empires. https://nomadicempires.history.ox.ac.uk/?page_id=150. Accessed 15 July 2026.

¹¹ “About the Global State of Democracy Initiative | the Global State of Democracy.” Idea.Int, 2025, <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/about-the-global-state-of-democracy-initiative>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

“Hybrid regimes are political systems that combine democratic elements, such as regular elections, with authoritarian practices, including restrictions on political opposition, media freedom, and judicial independence. These regimes often experience electoral malpractice, corruption, and weak rule of law, preventing elections from being fully free and fair. They commonly emerge from incomplete democratic transitions and tend to be stable over time”.¹²

Constituent Charters

The Constituent Charters were foundational constitutional proclamations issued in 1918 by the governing council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic. They served as a combination of declarations, provisional constitutional documents, and statements of political authority.¹³

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The overview of the Belarusian history

The Belarusian region has been defined by continuous human settlement. Belarus became part of Russia through the three partitions of the Polish - Lithuanian Commonwealth. Under Russian rule, Belarusian lands were reorganized into several provinces, including Minsk, Grondo, Mongilyov, Vilnia and Vitebsk. Until the establishment of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1922, Belarusian history was closely connected to developments within the Russian Empire. During the 19th century, Belarus experienced gradual industrial growth, particularly after the emancipation of the serfs, who were medieval peasants who cultivated a feudal lord's land, and the expansion of railways.

The people of Belarus were heavily affected by major political and military events in the early 20th century, including the founding of the Social-Democratic Labour Party in Minsk. Due to this reason, nearly 1.5 million people emigrated, mainly to the United States and Siberia.¹⁴

In 1918, during WWI, the Belarusian Democratic Republic declared independence while the region was occupied by German Forces. The Declaration of Independence happened in three phases, through three Constituent Charters. On January 1, 1919, the Byelorussian Soviet

¹² “Hybrid Regime - ECPS.” European Center for Populism Studies, <https://www.populismstudies.org/Vocabulary/hybrid-regime/>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

¹³ “The Constituent Charters of Belarus of 1918 – Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic.” *Radabnr.Org*, 28 May 2023, <https://www.radabnr.org/en/the-constituent-charters-of-belarus-of-1918/>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

¹⁴ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party | Political Party, Russia | Britannica.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russian-Social-Democratic-Workers-Party>. Accessed 28 July 2026.

Socialist Republic was established by the Bolsheviks, but its territory was soon contested during the Polish-Soviet War. After the end of the conflict, Belarus was divided between Poland and the Soviet Union. The Byelorussian S.S.R. became a founding republic of the Soviet Union in 1922.

During the turmoil of World War I and the Russian Revolution, Belarus sought independence, leading to the declaration of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in 1918 and the creation of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1919.¹⁵

Under Soviet General Secretary Joseph Stalin, industrialization expanded, but political repression and purges in the 1930s claimed the lives of many intellectuals, dissidents, and ordinary citizens. Thousands of Belarusian writers, academics, and political leaders were arrested, executed, or sent to labour camps during the Great Purge¹⁶, while institutions promoting Belarusian culture were dismantled. These policies suppressed political opposition and national identity, leaving a lasting legacy of authoritarian governance and limited political freedom

In the postwar period, Belarus underwent reconstruction and rapid industrialization. During the same period of time, long-term environmental damage was caused, population was displaced.

Following the reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev, Belarus declared sovereignty in 1990 and independence in 1991 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, becoming the republic of Belarus and joining the Commonwealth of Independent States. A new constitution adopted in 1994 created the presidency, and Alexander Lukashenko was elected as Belarus' first president. In a disputed 1996 referendum, Lukashenko expanded his powers, extended his term in office, and weakened the legislature, significantly increasing presidential authority. Under Lukashenko, Belarus maintained close political and economic ties with Russia through the Union State, while facing international criticism for authoritarian governance, including undemocratic elections, restrictions on the media, and repression of political opposition.

Political events during the Russian Rule

The beginning of this period is marked by the Partition of Poland (1795), which was a major turning point in Belarusian history by completing the annexation of Belarusian lands into the Russian Empire. It ended the political authority of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and placed Belarus under Russian rule. As a result, Belarus was integrated into the Russian

¹⁵ "Belarus - History." Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Belarus/History>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

¹⁶ Britannica. "Great Purge." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Purge>. Accessed 28 July 2026.

administrative and legal system, bringing significant political and institutional changes that influenced the country's development for more than a century.¹⁷

The Russian Revolution of 1905 encouraged political activism and nationalism in Belarus, increasing demands for reforms, civil rights, and national recognition. Although Tsarist control remained, the revolution strengthened Belarusian identity and laid the groundwork for future demands for autonomy and self-determination.¹⁸

The last event of this period is the Russian Revolution of 1917. It ended the rule of the Russian tsar and created a political power vacuum in Belarus. This encouraged independence movements and a struggle over Belarusian statehood. These developments eventually led to the creation of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), shaping Belarus's future within the Soviet Union.¹⁹

Political events during the emergence of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic

The Russian Revolution of 1905 stimulated Belarusian nationalism and revolutionary activity, with many peasants participating in protests against the monarchy. During the instability caused by World War I and the Russian Civil War, the Belarusian Democratic Republic declared independence in 1918 while much of it was under German occupation. After the withdrawal of German forces, the Bolsheviks established the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic on January 1, 1919, but its territory soon became contested during the conflict between Poland and Soviet Russia. The Treaty of Riga ended the war between Poland and Soviet Russia and divided Belarusian territory between the two states, shaping Belarus's political boundaries for the following decades.

Political events during World War II in Belarus

Political developments in Belarus during World War II were shaped by the harsh Nazi occupation, widespread Soviet partisan activity, and the destruction of much of the region's diverse population.

During World War II, Belarus became one of the main battlegrounds on the Eastern Front, suffering widespread destruction under Nazi occupation. The country was subjected to

¹⁷ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Partitions of Poland | Summary, Causes, Map, & Facts." Encyclopædia Britannica, 24 Oct. 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Partitions-of-Poland>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

¹⁸ Jacob, Leah. "Russian Revolution of 1905 | EBSCO." EBSCO Information Services, Inc. | Wwww.Ebsco.Com, 2023, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/russian-revolution-1905>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

¹⁹ "Homepage | Hearst Networks EMEA." Hearst Networks EMEA, 24 Sept. 2024, <https://www.hearstnetworks.com/>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

systematic genocidal policies, including the Holocaust, mass executions, and the destruction of entire villages. These events caused immense human losses and left a lasting impact on Belarus's political and social development.²⁰ Close to one-third of the country's population perished in the war. Within months, nearly all of Belarusian territory fell under German control. The occupation regime imposed harsh military rule, economic exploitation, and widespread repression.

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, Belarus became a major center of Soviet partisan resistance against Nazi occupation. Partisan units carried out sabotage operations, attacked German supply lines, gathered intelligence, and established resistance zones behind enemy lines, weakening German control over territory. These movements helped maintain Soviet influence during the occupation and later contributed to the formation of Belarus's postwar political elite. The partisan struggle also became an important element of Belarusian national memory and identity, shaping how the country remembered its role and sacrifices during World War II.²¹

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The emergence of independent Belarus

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Belarus declared its independence and began the complex process of establishing a sovereign political system. The newly adopted Constitution sought to introduce democratic institutions, including competitive elections, political pluralism, and the protection of fundamental rights. The country's first years of independence were marked by economic uncertainty and limited experience with democratic governance, which affected public confidence in political institutions. Although multiple political parties emerged and elections were held, many state structures and political elites remained heavily influenced by Soviet-era practices. These challenges laid the foundation for later debates surrounding electoral integrity, democratic accountability, and citizen participation.²²

²⁰ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. "Minsk." Ushmm.Org, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/minsk>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

²¹ "The Partisan Movements in Belarus During World War II (Part One) - Jamestown." Jamestown.Org, 2015, <https://jamestown.org/the-partisan-movements-in-belarus-during-world-war-ii-part-one/>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

²² Chapple, Amos. "Belarus: After Independence, Before Lukashenka." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, RFE/RL, 12 July 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-independence-before-lukashenka-1991-1994/33034042.html>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

The 1994 presidential election represented a significant milestone as it was Belarus's first direct presidential election after independence. Alexander Lukashenko won the election on an anti-corruption platform, reflecting widespread public dissatisfaction with economic hardship and political instability. While the election was initially viewed as competitive, it also marked the beginning of a gradual concentration of executive authority. Constitutional changes and political developments in the years that followed reduced institutional checks and balances and weakened the influence of opposition parties. These early transformations are crucial to understanding the evolution of electoral confidence in Belarus, as they shaped the country's political perceptions of democratic participation.²³

Political Events in Belarus during recent years

The 2020 presidential election marked a turning point in Belarus's modern political history and brought international attention to the country's electoral system. Official results declared Alexander Lukashenko the winner with a large majority, but opposition groups, independent observers, and numerous foreign governments questioned the credibility of the electoral process. The election triggered the largest protests in Belarus since independence, with hundreds of thousands of citizens demanding transparent vote counting, fair election, and greater political freedoms. The government's response included widespread arrests, restrictions on peaceful assembly, and increased limitations on independent media and civil society. These events significantly affected domestic and international confidence in Belarus's electoral institutions.²⁴

Since 2020, the political environment has become increasingly restrictive, with opposition parties, independent journalists, and civil society organizations facing substantial legal and administrative pressure. Electoral reforms introduced by the government have been criticized by international organizations for failing to address concerns regarding transparency, independent oversight, and political competition. As a result, voter trust and meaningful democratic participation have remained central issues in discussions about Belarus's governance. The ongoing situation has also raised border questions about the role of international organizations in promoting electoral integrity, protecting political rights, and encouraging inclusive democratic

²³ "Belarus - History." Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Belarus/History>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

²⁴ "Belarus' Exiled Political Opposition Struggles to Weaken Lukashenko's Hold." Equal Times, 11 Mar. 2025, <https://www.equaltimes.org/belarus-exiled-political>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

processes. These developments make Belarus a highly relevant case study for examining measures to strengthen electoral confidence and democratic participation.²⁵

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Belarus

Belarus scores poorly across most dimensions of the Global State of Democracy Framework. Over the past few years, democratic indicators, including Free Political Parties, Civil Liberties, Personal Integrity, Security, and Predictable enforcement have declined significantly, largely due to government repression of civil society, independent media, and opposition groups following the 2020 presidential elections and subsequent protests. Despite these political shortcomings, Belarus performs relatively well in terms of social welfare and economic equality, although the latter has recently deteriorated. As an upper-middle-income country, Belarus has retained a largely state-controlled economy, avoiding many disruptions associated with rapid privatization, but this has also increased its economic dependence on Russia.

Russia

Russia's policy toward Belarus focuses on maintaining the country within its sphere of influence through close political, economic, and military integration. Moscow seeks to strengthen the framework of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, which promotes cooperation in governance, defense, and economic policy. The Russian Federation regards Belarus as a strategically significant state that serves as a geopolitical buffer between Russia and NATO Member States.²⁶ Consequently, Russia seeks to maintain Belarus within its sphere of influence and discourage any political or strategic alignment with Western institutions. Russia has also expanded its military presence and cooperation with Belarus, particularly since the War in Ukraine, reinforcing its influence over Belarusian decision-making.²⁷ Since the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, Russia has expanded its military cooperation with Belarus through joint military exercises, the deployment of Russian troops, and the stationing of tactical

²⁵“World Report 2025: Rights Trends in Belarus.” Human Rights Watch, 6 Jan. 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/belarus>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

²⁶“Russian Annexation of Belarus | Council on Foreign Relations.” Cfr.Org, 3 June 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/reports/russian-annexation-of-belarus>. Accessed 26 July 2026.

²⁷ “Russian Annexation of Belarus | Council on Foreign Relations.” Cfr.Org, 3 June 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/reports/russian-annexation-of-belarus>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

nuclear weapons in Belarus. These actions have strengthened Russia's influence over Belarus's security and foreign policy.²⁸

Lithuania

Lithuania has been one of the most vocal European countries in criticizing the Belarusian government. As a neighboring country, it has consistently raised concerns about corruption, election fraud, and the lack of democratic governance. Lithuania has voiced these concerns in international organizations such as the European Union, the United Nations, and the OSCE. Following the disputed 2020 Belarusian presidential election, it supported sanctions against Belarusian officials and called for greater accountability. Lithuania has also supported the Belarusian democratic opposition and advocated for respect for human rights and the rule of law. Its actions reflect a strong commitment to promoting democracy and stability in the region.²⁹

Poland

Poland has been one of the strongest European critics of the Belarusian government. It has consistently condemned corruption, electoral fraud, political repression, and human rights abuses in Belarus through the European Union, the United Nations, and the OSCE. Following the disputed 2020 presidential election, Poland supported EU sanctions against Belarusian officials and called for democratic reforms. The country has also provided support to Belarusian civil society, independent media, and opposition activists. Through its diplomatic efforts, Poland has emphasized the importance of democracy, the rule of law, and regional security in its relations with Belarus.³⁰

Poland has been a strong critic of the Belarusian government, raising concerns about election fraud, political repression, and human rights violations. It has supported EU sanctions against Belarusian officials and advocated for democratic reforms. Poland has also provided support to Belarusian civil society and opposition groups, emphasizing the importance of democracy and the rule of law.³¹

²⁸ "Institute for the Study of War." Institute for the Study of War, <https://understandingwar.org/>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

²⁹ "The European Union and Belarus." EEAS, 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/belarus/european-union-and-belarus_en. Accessed 26 July 2026.

³⁰ "Conference to Support Democratic Belarus - Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland - Gov.PI Website." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland*, 2023, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/conference-to-support-democratic-belarus>. Accessed 26 July 2026.

³¹ "Conference to Support Democratic Belarus - Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland - Gov.PI Website." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland*, 2023, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/conference-to-support-democratic-belarus>. Accessed 26 July 2026.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE has played a major role in Belarus elections, assessing their fairness and promoting democratic standards. Through election observation missions and policy recommendations, it has worked to increase transparency, accountability, and public confidence in the electoral process.³²

The National Democratic Institute (NDI)

The NDI is a USA-based international nonprofit organization that works to strengthen democratic institutions and citizens' participation worldwide. In relation to Belarus, it has supported independent civil society groups, promoted voter education, encouraged citizen engagement in political processes, and provided training for democratic activists and election observers. Politically, the NDI advocates for free and fair elections, political pluralism, government accountability, and the protection of political rights. Its policies focus on increasing public participation in governance and strengthening confidence in democratic institutions through transparency and civic engagement.³³ However, the Belarussian administration does not allow the National Democratic Institute to operate inside the country. In fact, the Belarussian government officially forbade NDI's activities and shut down its in-country operation. Other than that, the Institute is in a position to provide its assistance and expertise as soon as the circumstances are suitable.

The international IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance has contributed to promoting electoral confidence and democratic participation in Belarus primarily through research, monitoring, and advocacy rather than direct electoral assistance. The organization regularly assesses the state of democracy in Belarus through its Global State of Democracy Initiative³⁴, publishes reports on electoral integrity and democratic governance, and has raised concerns over restrictions on political opposition, media freedom and civil society. It also advocates for free and fair elections, the protection of fundamental rights, and adherence to international electoral standards, while providing global examples of the best practices to support democratic reform.

³² "Our Work." Osce.Org, 2025, <https://www.osce.org/our-work>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

³³ "National Democratic Institute – Global Democracy Coalition." Globaldemocracycoalition.Org, 2026, <https://globaldemocracycoalition.org/partner/national-democratic-institute/>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

³⁴ "About the Global State of Democracy Initiative | the Global State of Democracy." *Idea.Int*, 2025, <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/about-the-global-state-of-democracy-initiative>. Accessed 26 July 2026.

The Human Rights Center Viasna

The Human Rights Center Viasna is a Belarusian human rights organization founded in 1996 to monitor and defend human rights and support victims of political repression. It became one of the country's leading independent human rights groups by documenting arbitrary arrests, unfair trials, restrictions on freedom of expression, and other human rights violations. During the 2020 Belarusian protests, Viasna played a crucial role in recording cases of police violence, monitoring political prisoners, and providing assistance to detainees and their families. The Belarussian authorities have repeatedly targeted the organization, and in 2021, its chairman, Ales Bialiatski, along with several other members, was arrested on politically motivated charges.³⁵ Despite ongoing repression, Viasna continues to document human rights abuses and advocate for democracy for democracy and the rule of law. In recognition of its work, Ales Bialiatski was awarded the 2022 Nobel Prize alongside the Russian organization Memorial and the Ukrainian Center for Civil Liberties.³⁶

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
5 December 1240	The overthrow of Kyiv by the Mongol invasion and the dissolution of Kievan Russians.
24 October 1975	The Third and final partition of Poland.
1795	Belarus becomes a part of Russia.
3 March 1861	The emancipation of the serfs, which freed over 23 million people and granted them basic civil rights.
13 March 1898	The founding of the Social-Democratic Labour Party in Minsk.

³⁵ “#FreeViasna.” *Freeviasna.Org*, 2020, <https://freeviasna.org/en>. Accessed 26 July 2026.

³⁶ “Human Rights Center Viasna.” OMCT, <https://www.omct.org/en/network-members/human-rights-center-viasna>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

21 February 1918	The Executive Committee of the All-Belarusian Congress issued its First Constituent Charter.
9 March 1918	The Second Constituent charter proclaimed the Belarussian Democratic Republic but did not yet declare full independence.
25 March 1918	The Third Constituent Charter declared the Belarussian Democratic Republic to be an independent and sovereign state.
1 January 1919	The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was established by the Bolsheviks.
18 March 1921	The Treaty of Riga ended the Polish-Soviet War and divided Belarus between Poland and Soviet Russia.
30 December 1922	The establishment of Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.
1 October 1928	Stalin Launched the First Five-Year Plan and forced collectivization of agriculture, marking the beginning of his personal rule in the Soviet Union.
10 February 1929	Stalin was widely recognized as the undisputed leader.
24 October 1945	Byelorussian S.S.R., received its own seat in the United Nations General Assembly.
27 July 1990	Belarus declared sovereignty.
25 August 1991	Belarus declared independence.
15 March 1994	Belarus adopted a new Constitution of Belarus.
10 July 1994	Alexander Lukashenko was elected as Belarus's first president.
24 November 1996	A nationwide constitutional referendum was held.

14 August 2020	Belarus's Central Election Commission certified the final results of the presidential election.
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RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

HRC/RES/61/26 <https://docs.un.org/en/a/hrc/res/61/26>

A resolution adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council that emphasizes the importance of promoting and protecting human rights through international cooperation and dialogue. It reaffirms the commitment of States to uphold the principles of the United Nations Charter and international human rights law. The resolution highlights the need to address human rights challenges in a fair, objective, and civil society to work together to strengthen the protection of fundamental freedoms. Particular attention is given to supporting vulnerable groups and ensuring equal access to justice and human rights protections. The resolution stresses the importance of capacity-building and technical assistance for countries facing human rights challenges. It further calls for continued engagement with relevant UN mechanisms to improve accountability and implementation. By fostering cooperation and respect for human dignity, HRC/RES/61/26 contributes to the global effort to advance human rights for all. Overall, the resolution reflects the Human Rights Council's ongoing commitment to promoting peace, equality, and the rule of law.³⁷

United Nations General Assembly Resolution ES-11/7
https://track.unodc.org/track/en/track/resourcehub/2025/resolution_11-7/resolution_11-7.html

United Nations General Assembly Resolution ES-11/7, adopted on 24 February 2025 reaffirmed the UN's commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity while calling for a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in accordance with the UN Charter. The resolution urged the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukrainian territory and emphasized respect for international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes.³⁸ Although its primary focus was the war in Ukraine, the resolution is relevant to Belarus due to the country's political and military support for Russia. As a result, Belarus faced increased international scrutiny and diplomatic pressure regarding its adherence to international norms. While the resolution did not

³⁷ "Document Viewer." Un.Org, 2026, <https://docs.un.org/en/a/hrc/res/61/26>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

³⁸"Resolution 11-7." *United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime*, 2021, https://track.unodc.org/track/en/track/resourcehub/2025/resolution_11-7/resolution_11-7.html. Accessed 27 July 2026.

directly address electoral confidence in Belarus, it reinforced broader calls for accountability, respect for democratic principles, and compliance with international obligations.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Mass Protests and Post-Election Demonstrations

Following the 2006 elections, thousands of activists protested reported electoral fraud, utilizing white-red-white flags and forming human chains before security forces ultimately dismantled the demonstrations.³⁹ The Jeans Revolution in 2006 was a peaceful pro-democracy movement in Belarus that emerged in response to the presidential election, which many believed was neither free nor fair. The movement was led by opposition supporters protesting the re-election of President Alexander Lukashenko, who had been in power since 1994. The name of the revolution originated when demonstrators adopted denim as a symbol of freedom and resistance after opposition flags were confiscated by the authorities. Thousands of people gathered in Minsk to demand democratic reforms, fair elections and greater political freedoms. The government responded by dispersing protests, arresting demonstrators, and detaining opposition leaders. Thousands of people gathered in Minsk to demand democratic reforms, fair elections, and greater political freedoms. Although the movement did not achieve immediate political change, it became an important symbol of democratic resistance in Belarus and inspired future pro-democracy activism, including the larger protests that followed in 2020.

Following the heavily contested 2020 presidential election, hundreds of thousands of Belarusians participated in nationwide pro-democracy demonstrations. Protesters formed cross-class coalitions to demand fair elections, though these were ultimately met with mass arrests and violent crackdowns.⁴⁰ The protests began after the presidential elections of August 9 2020, in which President Alexander Lukashenko claimed victory amid widespread allegations of electoral fraud. Hundreds of thousands of Belarusians participated in peaceful demonstrations, demanding free and fair elections, the release of political prisoners, and an end to police violence. The opposition, led by Sviatlana Thikhanouska, became a symbol of the pro-democracy movement after she rejected the election's results and later went into exile. The Belarussian authorities responded with a harsh crackdown, using riot police, mass arrests and reports to torture and abuse against protesters. Although the demonstrations did not remove Lukashenko from power, they became the largest movements in Belarus's history and drew

³⁹Nechyparenka, Yauheniya. STUDENT PAPER SERIES Democratic Transition in Belarus: Cause(S) of Failure. 2010, https://www.ibei.org/ibei_studentpaper03_71875.pdf. Accessed 15 July 2026.

⁴⁰ Onuch, Olga, and Gwendolyn Sasse. "The Belarus Crisis: People, Protest, and Political Dispositions." *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 38, no. 1–2, Feb. 2022, pp. 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2022.2042138>.

widespread international condemnation, leading to sanctions and increased global attention to the country's human rights situation.⁴¹

Although the 2020 mass protests highlighted widespread distrust in the election results, they were not accompanied by an independent international inquiry into the alleged irregularities. An investigation led by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe of the United Nations could have provided an impartial assessment of the electoral process, helping increase transparency and public confidence while supporting future electoral reforms.

International election observation by the OSCE/ODIHR

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe has made repeated efforts to improve confidence in Belarus' electoral process through election observation conducted by its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. ODIHR regularly assesses whether elections comply with international democratic standards, including transparency, fairness, and equal political participation.⁴² In successive Belarusian presidential and parliamentary elections, its observers identified recurring shortcomings such as non-transparent vote counting, restrictions on opposition candidates, unequal media coverage and the lack of independence of elections commissions.⁴³ Following each mission, ODIHR issued recommendations aimed at increasing transparency, strengthening electoral administration, and ensuring equal conditions for all candidates. However, these recommendations were only minimally implemented, and many of the same concerns persisted in later elections. Before the 2020 presidential election, Belarus failed to invite ODIHR observers within the required time frame, preventing the deployment of a full election observation mission. The absence of internationally recognized observers further weakened public confidence in the credibility of the electoral process and highlighted the limited impact of external monitoring when governments are unwilling to cooperate or enact meaningful electoral reforms.⁴⁴

Human Rights Center Viasna's response to the 2020 Protest

⁴¹ ---. "Belarus: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report." *Freedom House*, 2021, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2021>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

⁴² "Elections in Belarus | OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights." *Osce.Org*, 2019, <https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/elections/belarus>. Accessed 27 July 2026.

⁴³ "Odihr Will Not Deploy Election Observation Mission to Belarus Due to Lack of Invitation." *Osce.Org*, 15 July 2020, <https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/elections/457309>. Accessed 27 July 2026.

⁴⁴ "OSCE PA Leaders Criticize Belarus's Failure to Extend Timely Invitation to Observe Election and to Provide a Level Playing Field for All Stakeholders." *Osce.Org*, 16 July 2020, <https://www.osce.org/parliamentary-assembly/457405>. Accessed 27 July 2026.

During the 2020 Belarussian presidential election and the protests that followed, the Human Rights Center Viasna played a vital role in defending human rights and promoting accountability. The organization documented thousands of cases of arbitrary arrests, police violence, torture, and other human rights violations committed against peaceful protesters. Viasna also provided legal assistance to detainees and their families, monitored the treatment of political prisoners, and published regular reports to inform the international community about the situation in Belarus. Despite facing severe government repression, including the imprisonment of several of its members, Viasna continued its work to protect fundamental freedoms and support democratic participation. Its efforts have been widely recognized as an important contribution to the promotion of human rights and the rule of law in Belarus.⁴⁵

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Establish an Independent Electoral Commission

An independent electoral commission should be created to oversee elections fairly and without political interference. The commission should include non-partisan experts, civil society representatives, and members from different political groups. It would manage voter registration, supervise vote counting, and ensure transparent election results. International organizations, such as the OSCE, could provide technical support and monitor the process to ensure elections meet international democratic standards.⁴⁶ To reduce the possibility of government disagreement, the process could be introduced gradually through dialogue between authorities, political groups, and civil society. Providing clear benefits, such as increased international credibility, stronger economic cooperation, and improved public trust, may encourage the Belarussian government to support electoral reforms.

Create a Digital Election Transparency Portal

Member States should establish a publicly accessible digital platform where polling station results, voter turnout, and official election data are published in real time. The platform should allow citizens, journalists, and independent organizations to compare local results with

⁴⁵ Office, Development. "The Human Rights Situation in Belarus: Joint Statement to the OSCE, September 2025." GOV.UK, 11 Sept. 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-human-rights-situation-in-belarus-joint-statement-to-the-osce-september-2025>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

⁴⁶ "How to Reform Elections Democratically." Wfd.Org, 19 Jan. 2026, <https://www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/how-reform-elections-democratically>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

national totals, making it easier to detect irregularities and increasing public confidence in the electoral process.⁴⁷

Establish Local Community Dialogue Forums

Member States create local community dialogue forums with a strict overview that bring together citizens, authorities, civil society organizations, and experts to discuss electoral concerns and democratic reforms. These forums would allow people to share concerns, form questions, and suggest improvements to the electoral process. Meetings could take place before and after elections, with public summaries to promote transparency. By encouraging open communication and citizen participation, these forums would help rebuild trust and strengthen confidence in Belarus's electoral system.

Protect Independent Civil Society Networks

Member States support the ability of civil society organizations to operate freely and engage citizens in public life. This can be achieved by removing restrictions on non-governmental organizations, protecting activists from retaliation, and allowing peaceful civil initiatives. A strong civil society is essential for encouraging public participation and ensuring that citizens can express their views without fear. To encourage government acceptance, civil organizations could work through transparent frameworks that promote cooperation with public institutions rather than confrontation. Establishing regular dialogue between authorities, NGOs and communities can help address social concerns, strengthen trust and ensure that public initiatives contribute positively to national development.

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⁴⁷ Eligo Team. "How to Set up a Secure Online Voting System." Eligo Voting, Aug. 2024, <https://eligovoting.com/how-to-set-up-a-secure-online-voting-system/>. Accessed 15 July 2026.

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