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# ANALYSIS OF THE MIGRATION CRISIS ON THE POLISH-BELARUSIAN BORDER

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## Abstract

The aim of this essay is to present and analyse the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. In this essay, I will present the causes of the crisis, the geopolitical background and clarify the concept of the hybrid war. Alexander Lukashenka, in response to the EU sanctions imposed on the Belarusian regime for the falsification of presidential elections, decided to create an artificial migration pressure on the Polish – Belarusian and Belarusian – Lithuanian border. The migration crisis is part of a hybrid war that was directed against Poland and Lithuania, as these countries actively supported the Belarusian opposition. This is a part of the Belarusian-Russian operation “**Śluza**” directed against the West, and is aimed to weaken the EU and demonstrate that the Union is incapable of protecting its own external borders.

## Key words

Belarus, Alexander Lukashenka, hybrid war, Poland, migration crisis

## Introduction

The migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border was provoked by the political turmoil in Belarus in 2020. This turmoil resulted from the falsification of the presidential elections in August 2020. Aleksander Lukashenko remained president, a position he held since 1994<sup>1</sup>. According to information posted by the Central Election Commission, Lukashenko received over 80% of the votes. After the elections, independent analysts from groups such as Honest People, Gołos, and Zubr recounted the votes using copies of electoral commission protocols. Despite the difficult conditions and harassment by the Belarusian authorities, the analysts managed to publish a report which reveals that electoral fraud has been committed in one-third of the analysed cases. Subsequently, the publication of this report launched a wave of protests throughout Belarus.

The Belarusian authorities decided to violently suppress the gatherings of protesters and arrested opposition members as well as affiliated journalists and activists. For instance, Belsat TV, which is funded by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has been declared an extremist organisation. In addition, a well-functioning propaganda machinery spread information about oppositionists' links with Western secret services as well as plans to an alleged armed

coup or organising anti-state guerrillas<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, the events in Belarus prompted the European Union to introduce four packages of sanctions from October 2020 to June 2021, targeting 166 individuals and 15 businesses. The restrictions imposed in June 2021, were specifically in response to the grounding of a Ryanair airline plane flying from Athens to Vilnius (23 May 2021), under the pretext of a possible terrorist attack. However, the real purpose of the plane's detention was the arrest of opposition figure Roman Protasiewicz<sup>3</sup>.

In that context, the Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanouska said that the sanctions should be better coordinated, as significant loopholes remain. As an example, she mentions a loophole related to the trade of potassium chloride, one of Belarus' key exports and the only raw material the country has in abundance<sup>3</sup>.

## Hybrid conflict using demographic pressure

To retaliate against the EU's questioning the legitimacy of the elections and for the sanctions, Alexander Lukashenko decided to provoke a hybrid conflict using immigrants, mainly coming from Iraq. The actions of the Belarusian president mainly target Lithuania and Poland. As Arthur Kenigsberg, founder of the think tank EuroCreative, points out Lukashenko wanted to create chaos

1 *Results of the presidential election in Belarus on August 9, 2020*, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1147363/belarus-presidential-election-results/> (access: 18.08.2020 r.).

2 M. Budzisz, *Władza bez społecznego mandatu. Opozycja również nie może mówić, że wygrała wybory*, „Strategy nad Future,” 2021, 1/2021, <https://strategyandfuture.org/> (access: 13.02.2022 r.).

3 A. Szabaciuk, *Białoruś rok po wyborach prezydenckich: próba bilansu*, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/bialorus-rok-po-wyborach-prezydenckich-proba-bilansu/> (access: 12.08.2021 r.).

in the region and punish Poland and Lithuania for supporting the Belarusian opposition<sup>4</sup>. In the summer of 2021, Belarusian border services began bringing economic migrants from the Middle East, who wanted to enter Western European countries through Lithuania and Poland. The Belarusian regime brought in several thousand people. The authorities in Minsk completely controlled this procedure, both administratively and logistically<sup>5</sup>.

Notably, Timofiej Bardaczow, the program director of the Valdai Club, presents interesting reflections on the subject. In his opinion, the crisis caused by Alexander Lukashenko and the attitude the founding members of the EU<sup>6</sup> had towards the problem allowed to show what politics will look like in the times of the twilight of liberal democracy, where the “concert of superpowers” will be put in practice.

The decision-making centres in Europe (i.e., the Brussels-Berlin-Paris axis) do not feel obliged to defend the interests of peripheral countries. It is not difficult to notice that Lithuania and Poland are perceived in Europe as the American ‘Trojan horse’, which often undertakes to defend the interests of its main ally, without considering the potential consequences of the decisions taken<sup>7</sup>.

However, as the situation at the border was developing dynamically, the Polish and Lithuanian border guards began to notice an increasing number of migrants. The entire Belarusian operation was part of the Belarusian-Russian operation “Śluza”, which aims to weaken the position of the EU and show that it is incapable of defending its external borders on its own<sup>8</sup>. The recruitment of migrants was carried out by so-called “travel agencies”, affiliated with the Belarusian administration. These agencies provided assistance in transferring migrants to Belarus and then across the Polish and Lithuanian borders to Western Europe. As part of the service, the agencies provided flights, hotel stays, transfers to the border, and assistance in crossing the border. The price for such a service varied from a few to several thousand dollars per person. It is estimated that Lukashenko may have gathered around 10,000 migrants in Belarus. Flights were operated from the Middle East, Caucasus countries, Turkey and Egypt to Minsk<sup>9</sup>.

In view of the increasingly tense situation on the Polish-Belarusian border, the President of Poland declared a state of emergency by decree on 2 September 2021. This state of emergency was extended by the Sejm for a further 60 days by decision of 28 September 2021.

4 K. Stańko, *Lukaszenka chce ukarać Polskę i Litwę za udzielanie pomocy białoruskiej opozycji*, *Gazeta prawna*, <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/swiat/artykuly/8313575,lukaszenka-polska-litwa-kara-za-pomoc-bialoruskiej-opozycji.html> (access: 14.12.2022 r.).

5 A. M. Dyer, *Kryzys graniczny jako przykład działań hybrydowych*, „Strategic File” 2022, Nr 2 (110).

6 i.e. Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

7 M. Budzisz, *Kryzys na litewskiej granicy zwiastunem nowej epoki*, „Strategy and Future” 2021, Nr 8/2021.

8 *Białoruska „Operacja Śluza”. Starannie przygotowany plan służb*, <https://infosecurity24.pl/bezpieczenstwo-wewnetrzne/bialoruska-operacja-sluza-starannie-przygotowany-plan-sluzb> (access: 18.02.2023 r.).

9 K. Wasilewski, *Kryzys graniczny. Kto zarabia na migrantach?*, *Tygodnik TVP*, wydanie nr 204, <https://tygodnik.tvp.pl/56384385/kryzys-graniczny-kto-zarabia-na-migrantach> (access: 23.03.2023 r.).

Journalists, social activists, or politicians were not allowed to enter the area during the state of emergency, so that the monopoly on reporting information on the situation at the border was given to the Polish authorities.<sup>10</sup> On 4 November 2021, the Sejm passed a law on the construction of a wall on the Belarusian border. The project was implemented in June of 2022. The wall is to include perimeter protection, including sensors, cameras and other technical equipment. The cost to be borne by the state treasury was approximately PLN 1.6 billion<sup>11</sup>.

## Intensification of tension at the border

An escalation and increased migratory pressure took place on 8 November 2021, in the vicinity of the Kuźnica border crossing, where hundreds of foreigners, with the help of Belarusian services, tried to force their way across the Polish-Belarusian border. The migrants were instrumentally used by the Belarusian regime to achieve specific political goals. The attacks carried out by migrants on the Polish border were coordinated and controlled by the Belarusian authorities<sup>12</sup>.

It should be noted that the psychological and propaganda aspect played a large role in this crisis. Including the creation of a false impression that the people at the border are refugees saving their lives. The migrants being brought in are mainly people from Turkey or Iraq, places where most of them were not in danger. Let us not forget that all these people came to Belarus on tourist visas, to a country safe for them<sup>12</sup>.

People trying to cross the border were encouraged to behave aggressively towards border guards, policemen, and/or soldiers. Media controlled by the Belarusian government, were spreading disinformation and creating an atmosphere of hatred. The officers of the State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus (KGB) and the Belarusian border guard (GPK) tried to provoke the Polish armed forces with aggressive behaviour such as throwing stones, pointing firearms, or blinding with strobe lights or lasers<sup>13</sup>. Further, the direct involvement of the Belarusian services in this crisis is shown by the presence of Vitaly Stasiukiewicz<sup>14</sup> at the border. The situation on the Polish-Belarusian border remains tense, with border guards reporting every day on attempts to illegally enter Polish territory<sup>15</sup>.

10 Ustawa z dnia 29 października 2021 r. o budowie zabezpieczenia granicy państwowej, Dz.U. 2021 poz. 1992.

11 Konferencja szefa MSWiA w sprawie budowy zapory na granicy, <https://www.onet.pl/informacje/onetwiadomosci/konferencja-szefa-mswia-w-sprawie-budowy-zapory-na-granicy-na-zywo/7qpc6fm,79cfc278> (access: 14.02.2023 r.).

12 W. Repetowicz, *Atak reżimu Łukaszenki na Polskę i cyniczne wykorzystanie kryzysu afgańskiego*, <https://infosecurity24.pl/atak-rezimu-lukaszenki-na-polske-i-cyniczne-wykorzystanie-kryzysu-afganskiego-opinia> (access: 14.02.2023 r.).

13 B. Makarewicz, *Białoruscy żołnierze chcieli zniszczyć zaporę. Oslepiali nasze służby laserem*, <https://wiadomosci.radiozet.pl/Polska/Bialoruscy-zolnierze-chcieli-zniszczyc-zapore.-Oslepiali-nasze-sluzby-laserem> (access: 14.02.2023 r.).

14 Vitaly Stasiukiewicz is the head of public security at the Department of Internal Affairs of the Grodno Oblast Executive Committee.

15 <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/tlumil-protesty-widziano-go-na-granicy-kim-jest-witalij-stasiukiewicz/5yt40dr> (access: 14.02.2023 r.).

## The geopolitical factor

Demographic pressure is one of the elements of the hybrid war against Poland. The confrontation is taking place on many levels, both in the media sphere, overt and covert diplomatic channels, in the cyberspace, in the economic sphere, and the energy spheres, and directly on the border. It should be remembered that the confrontation takes place not only between Belarus and the EU, but also between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)<sup>16</sup>. Many experts point out that the current crisis is taking place in an important point of the eastern flank of the alliance, the Suwałki gap. Securing this 80-kilometre strip, which divides the Republic of Belarus from the Kaliningrad region, is of great strategic importance for NATO<sup>17</sup>.

At the same time Alexander Lukashenko's actions condemn Belarus to self-isolation and undermine its image in the international arena. This, in turn, gives the Russian Federation a whole range of opportunities to exert pressure on an isolated Belarus, which in the current geostrategic realities is condemned to the Kremlin's assistance. Significantly, on 4 November 2021 Alexander Lukashenko met Vladimir Putin, with the aim of signing a 28-union programme tightening integration within the Union of Belarus and Russia (ZBiR). At a joint press conference, Putin and Lukashenko

announced that the agreement would not involve a common currency. The same applies to the creation of joint political bodies within the federal state. When it comes to more difficult economic issues, such as the unification of tax policy, the agreement only sets out a certain general framework and legislative changes have been postponed for at least three years. A uniform price for energy carriers, including Russian natural gas, is to be applied from 2022. The details of the agreement disclosed by the Russian government are quite vague and the specified deadlines may be modified. Consequently, the signed treaty on deeper integration is more of a propaganda nature than a tangible one. Both countries, depending on their room for manoeuvre, may modify the provisions of the signed agreement<sup>18</sup>.

Importantly, Brian Whitmore, who is an analyst at a think tank called the Atlantic Council, states that there is now "the most significant qualitative shift in the security equation on NATO's eastern flank since Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the military intervention in Donbass". With this, the analyst was referring to the presence of Russian Su-30 M fighter jets in the Belarusian city of Bobruisk. This could mark the prelude to the establishment of a permanent Russian base in Belarus. In essence, it is not an economic integration, but the presence of Russian troops in Belarus that will allow Putin

16 M. Nykiel, *Szturm na granice, operacja Łukaszenki, rosyjska agentura w Polsce i tajny plan Putina. Wojna hybrydowa weszła w kluczowy, niebezpieczny etap. ANALIZA*, <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/573403-migranci-lukaszenka-i-tajny-plan-putina-ta-wojna-narasta> (access: 14.02.2023 r.).

17 Na temat strategicznego znaczenia przesmyku suwalskiego dla Sojuszu Północnoatlantyckiego szerzej m.in. w: B. Parafianowicz, *The military-geographical significance of the Suwałki Gap*, „Kwartalnik Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego” 2017, 17(4), s. 3–20; L. Scholtz, *The Suwalki gap dilemma. A strategic and operational analysis*, *Militaire Spectator*, <https://www.militairespectator.nl/thema/strategie-operaties/artikel/suwalki-gap-dilemma> (access: 16.02.2023 r.).

18 *Łukaszenka i Putin zatwierdzili programy pogłębienia integracji Białorusi i Rosji*, *Gazeta Prawna* z dnia 4.11. 2021.

to keep Minsk in the Russian sphere of influence.

Another important event in the context of the ongoing Polish-Belarusian border crisis was the Geneva Summit in June, where Joe Biden met Vladimir Putin for the first time. The meeting did not create any breakthrough in bilateral relations. The leaders discussed international security issues (i.e., the conflict in Ukraine and Syria), international crises (i.e., in Afghanistan and Iran), cyber-attacks, disinformation, and the geopolitical importance of the Arctic, among other issues. The meeting showed Putin that he is dealing with a weak adversary who will react mildly to Russia's hostile actions towards the US. Possible reactions will be oriented towards de-escalation through compromise solutions rather than confrontation. The Russian president interpreted the conciliatory attitude of the US president as a weakness that he exploits in his geopolitical games on the European continent, the eastern part (i.e., Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states) which he sees as Russia's exclusive sphere of influence<sup>19</sup>.

## Propaganda and polarisation of society

Observation of the events along the Polish-Belarusian border allows us to see the evolution of the narrative concerning the migration crisis. Both in the media and on the Internet we can find a lot of propaganda material spread by the Belarusian and Russian media.

Unfortunately, some of the Polish media also reproduced certain accusations or claims made by Lukashenko's and Putin's propaganda<sup>20</sup>.

Furthermore pressure has been put on the Polish administration to allow migrants into its territory by using the argument of a humanitarian crisis. In this connection, pictures of crying and cold mothers with children asking Polish border guards to let them into Poland were circulated. The propagation of such images was intended to give the right media narrative about the "inhuman" or even "bestial" treatment of Middle Eastern newcomers.

Such information was disseminated in current affairs programmes or social media. Official positions of the Belarusian administration urged Poland to treat the migrants humanely and to allow them into the territory of the Republic. Attempts were made to blame the Polish government for the entire situation, which was part of Lukashenko's propaganda efforts. The promoted narrative was a textbook example of hybrid actions based on disinformation and manipulation of facts.

However, the Belarusian authorities, seeing firm resistance from the Polish authorities, decided to orchestrate attacks at the border by hundreds of migrants at the Kuźnica – Bruzgi border crossing. We could observe forcing and destruction of security installations, clashes of migrants with police and soldiers, and active attacks on Polish law enforcement). In this case, the active participation of the

19 A. Legucka, A. Dąbrowski, *Bez resetu: spotkanie Biden-Putin w Genewie*, [https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/Bez\\_resetu\\_spotkanie\\_BidenPutin\\_w\\_Genewie](https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/Bez_resetu_spotkanie_BidenPutin_w_Genewie) (access: 24.02.2023 r.).

20 *Działania psychologiczno-dezinformacyjne kluczowe w ataku na Polskę* [OPINIA], <https://infosecurity24.pl/dzialania-psychologiczno-dezinformacyjne-kluczowe-w-ataku-na-polske-opinia> (access: 25.02.2023 r.).

Belarusian secret services in the organisation of the attack on the borders was unquestionable. The officers coordinated the march of migrants to the border crossing point in Kuźnica and equipped the migrants with tools for destroying the security and with concussion grenades<sup>21</sup>. The storming of the Kuźnica border crossing was immediately used for propaganda purposes. The Belarusian Investigative Committee opened a criminal case against the Polish officers, accusing them of committing “crimes against humanity”<sup>22</sup>.

More importantly, the current tactic used by the Belarusian regime is to send smaller groups of migrants to less well guarded places on the border. Polish authorities remain consistent and do not allow illegal entry into Poland. Airlines that used to transport migrants to Minsk stopped doing so when the EU threatened Belarus with sanctions. Middle Easterners who were possibly interested in getting to Western Europe via the Polish border are being told that it is not easy and the border is well protected. Many surveys conducted show that Poles have a positive view of the government’s actions and the attitude of the Polish services at the border<sup>23</sup>.

The hybrid nature of the attack on the Polish border shows that we are facing a new threat. The burden of destabilising the EU has been shifted from the

Lithuanian border to Poland, as our society is more easily polarised. Therefore, the principles of hybrid warfare needs to be explained so that the Polish society is aware of the threat and does not succumb so easily to polarisation. It is worth quoting here just a few elements from theoretical studies relating to the assumptions of the so-called “Gerasimov doctrine”, indicating the elements of actions that can and should be implemented in hybrid warfare. These include:

- asymmetric operations (allowing the exploitation of the opponent’s weaknesses),
- disinformation of the leadership through the so-called active influence by means of combined – overt and covert – special actions (operations) carried out by both the broadly understood media and the special services,
- disintegration of the opponent’s political and military system (more broadly: the state’s security system, also in its internal aspect),
- application on an operational and strategic scale of the tools of information and psychological warfare<sup>24</sup>.

The Polish government opposes the entry of migrants into its territory and thus into the Schengen area, in which document controls at internal borders between states are abolished. This means that most of the illegal migrants would be able to reach the Schengen countries

21 *Atak migrantów na polskich funkcjonariuszy. Szturm w Kuźnicy*, <https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/226921/mon-publikuje-oburzajace-nagranie-polscy-funkcjonariusze-zostali-zaatakowani.html> (access: 05.03.2023 r.).

22 *Kryzys na granicy. Białoruś zarzuca polskim funkcjonariuszom „zbrodnie przeciwko ludzkości”*, <https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2021-11-17/kryzys-na-granicy-bialorus-zarzuca-polskim-funkcjonariuszom-zbrodnie-przeciwko-ludzkości/> (access: 05.03.2023 r.).

23 *Oto, jak Polacy oceniają działania rządu ws. kryzysu na granicy*, <https://dorzeczy.pl/sondaz/225772/polacy-ocenili-dzialania-rzadu-ws-kryzysu-na-granicy.html> (access: 05.03.2023 r.).

24 D. Materniak, *Kryzys na granicy polsko-białoruskiej: nie przegrać bardziej niż dotąd*, <http://obserwatormiędzynarodowy.pl/2021/08/23/kryzys-na-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej-nie-przegrac-bardziej-niz-dotad> (access: 14.03.2023 r.).

without any major problems. This policy has been pursued consistently since the beginning of the migration crisis<sup>25</sup>.

By contrast, the media spreads different narratives on the ongoing hybrid conflict on the Polish border. Some of the liberal-left media have fuelled the polarisation of society towards the situation. Some media have fostered the spread of disinformation or even downplayed the scale and nature of the problem. Many news programmes featured prominent social activists or politicians trying to put the state administration and the army in a bad light. Activists from non-governmental organisations or celebrities call for the admission of foreigners into Poland or the creation of a humanitarian corridor, which they claim would reduce the pressure and end the ongoing crisis. Such a course of action could have devastating consequences. Concessions on the part of Poland would be interpreted as weakness and would contribute to increased migratory pressure and encourage the Belarusian regime to use other instruments of hybrid warfare in its confrontation with the EU and NATO<sup>26</sup>.

Moreover, the Polish authorities decided not to use the support of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). The government justifies its decision by stating that the agency does not have the resources or tools that could actually support Poland. However, to all appearances the Polish government is concerned about the

potential political costs that could result from using the assistance of an EU agency, in the context of the strained relations between the Polish government and the EU<sup>26</sup>. Frontex was established in 2021 and is expected to have around 10,000 officers by 2027. At present, from the information available on the agency's website<sup>27</sup> Frontex counts around 600 officers, which are deployed on the borders of the entire Schengen zone. It should be remembered that around nine thousand soldiers and about 2 thousand police officers were deployed on the Polish-Belarusian border.

In addition, journalist Elisabeth Braw of Politico points out that the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border should not be called a migration crisis but a border or geopolitical crisis. The word crisis immediately brings back to mind the migration pressures of 2015-2016. At that time millions of refugees coming from Arab and African countries stormed the EU borders, following the outbreak of war in the Middle East. It should be remembered that as many as 2.5 million people applied for asylum in the EU then. In the case of the Polish-Belarusian border crisis, several thousand migrants are being used by the Belarusian regime as a tool of hybrid warfare. Therefore, the current state of affairs should be referred to as a 'hybrid attack', 'geopolitical confrontation' or 'politically motivated artificial migration pressure', as this helps to reflect the real nature of the event and influences

25 A. Krajewski, *Przez kryzys na granicy opozycja znalazła się między młotem a kowadłem* [FELIETON]. *Gazeta Prawna* z dnia 20.11.2021.

26 M. Sewastianowicz, P. Rojek-Socha, *Rząd nie chce Frontexu, bo może bać się kosztów unijnego wsparcia*, <https://www.prawo.pl/prawo/pomoc-frontexu-nato-przy-kryzysie-migracyjnym-a-skutki-prawne,511678.html> (access: 14.03.2023 r.).

27 <https://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/faq/key-facts/> (access: 15.03.2023 r.).



the formation of situational awareness among the public. The use of appropriate terminology is crucial in creating the right narrative and at the same time constitutes an effective weapon against disinformation and propaganda from Minsk and Moscow<sup>28</sup>.

## International repercussions

The EU has decided to impose a package of economic sanctions targeting Belarusian entities and citizens associated with the regime. The sanctions include the freezing of assets, a ban on entry to the territory of the EU or the closure of airspace and airports for the Belarusian airline Belavia<sup>29</sup>. Expert opinions on the effectiveness of the sanctions are divided. Kamil Kłysiński, an expert from the Centre for Eastern Studies, believes that the sanctions make sense and, in the long run, will have a negative impact on the Belarusian business sphere<sup>30</sup>.

Conversely, economist Jarosław Romańczuk argues that the sanctions have only a symbolic dimension, as in reality trade between Belarus and the EU is booming. Sanctions are also relatively easy to circumvent using a chain of commercial intermediaries. At the same time, sanctions are resulting in closer cooperation between Belarus and Russia<sup>31</sup>.

However, it is difficult to determine exactly what function the Russian Federation has in the hybrid war taking place on the Polish border. Mark Galeotti argues that Alexander Lukashenko would not have decided on such an undertaking without the support of the Kremlin. Undoubtedly, since the beginning of the crisis, Russia has supported Belarus politically and propaganda-wise, making harsh accusations against the Polish authorities and its allies, blaming the West for destabilising the Middle East and contributing to the migrant crisis. German expert Andreas Ulman describes the Russian actions as “maskirovka”, an action aimed at provoking the opponent to behave in a certain way as envisaged by the Russian authorities<sup>32</sup>.

The crisis led Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron to contact Vladimir Putin by telephone and discuss the migration problem caused by the Belarusian regime. Naturally, the Russian Federation distanced itself from the events on the Polish-Belarusian border and recommended direct contact with Lukashenko. On the other hand, Putin continues to support Lukashenko with propaganda and blames the EU for triggering the crisis.

Further, Angela Merkel had a telephone conversation with Alexander

28 E. Braw, *Stop calling what's happening with Belarus a migration crisis*, <https://www.politico.eu/article/belarus-border-migration-geopolitical-crisis-nato-eu/> (access: 18.03.2023 r.).

29 K. Kłysiński, *Białoruś: kolejne sankcje Zachodu*, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2021-12-03/bialorus-kolejne-sankcje-zachodu> (access: 18.03.2023 r.).

30 M. Wierciszewski, *Kryzys na granicy z Białorusią. Dlaczego sankcje mają sens, a Polska stała się głównym obiektem ataku*, <https://businessinsider.com.pl/finanse/kryzys-na-granicy-z-bialorusia-dlaczego-sankcje-majasens-a-polska-stala-sie-glownym/96jfglb> (access: 18.03.2023 r.)

31 „Handel kwitnie”. „Rz”: *Sankcje wobec Białorusi to fikcja*, <https://dorzeczy.pl/ekonomia/224338/rzeczpospolita-sankcje-wobec-bialorusi-to-fikcja.html> (access: 19.03.2023 r.)

32 A. Szabaciuk, *The crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border in the context of rising tensions in Eastern Europe*, <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/the-crisis-on-the-polish-belarusian-border-in-the-context-of-rising-tensions-in-eastern-europe-part-1/> (access: 18.03.2023 r.).

Lukashenko on 15 November 2021. The conversation was criticised by representatives of the Belarusian opposition, Polish diplomacy and some German media and politicians. Lukashenko demanded the creation of a humanitarian corridor to Germany and the admission of some 2,000 refugees; he himself promised to deport 5,000 people. Germany has officially denied having accepted Lukashenko's conditions. The Belarusian dictator, on the other hand, stated during his conversation with Putin that he intended to honour his part of the deal. The second Merkel-Lukashenko exchange took place on 17 November 2021. During this exchange, issues of humanitarian aid and the involvement of the UN and the International Organisation for Migration in the deportation process were raised<sup>33</sup>.

It is important to mention Mateusz Morawiecki's diplomatic offensive, which took place between 21 and 26 November 2021. The Prime Minister visited the Baltic States, met with the leaders of the Visegrad Group countries in Budapest and the Prime Minister of Slovenia in Ljubljana. There were also meetings with government leaders in Paris, Berlin and London<sup>33</sup>.

Similarly, Polish President Andrzej Duda met with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Brussels on 25 November 2021 to address security issues in the Central and Eastern European region<sup>34</sup>.

## Summary

The crisis began to fade away gradually. Undoubtedly, rising costs of operations and weather conditions may have been an important contributing factor. The softening of Belarus' attitude may have been triggered by an ultimatum given by the Polish side, which threatened to close the Kuźnica railway crossing. Thus, the border crisis demonstrated Lukashenko's weakness and made it easier for the Russian Federation to tighten contacts with Belarus, thereby Belarus is slowly being absorbed by Russia.

The firm attitude of the Polish government in defending the Polish-Belarusian border has undoubtedly contributed to slow reassurance of migratory pressure. Furthermore, the unity of the EU in this crisis proved to be a shake-up for Lukashenko, who did not expect such determined resistance.

Overall, an unfortunate conundrum is that Poland's eastern policy has been restrained over the years, resulting in a lack of business, capital, economic, cultural, agency or military influence. This was the reason for Poland's ineffective influence in the East. During the Belarus crisis, it became apparent that we were an object of politics in the region rather than an organising entity. This is exemplified by the talks of German or French leaders with Putin and Lukashenko over the head of Poland. In addition, the attempts at a democratic coup in Belarus, supported by Poland and Lithuania, failed and left Belarus completely dependent on Russia.

33 *Ofensywa dyplomatyczna w związku z kryzysem na granicy polsko-białoruskiej*, <https://www.polskieradio.pl/399/7975/Artykul/2852388,Ofensywa-dyplomatyczna-w-zwiazku-z-kryzysem-na-granicy-polskobialoruskiej> (access: 18.03.2023 r.)

34 S. Temizer, *Polish president urges NATO to bolster eastern flank*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/polish-president-urges-nato-to-bolster-eastern-flank/2431035> (access: 18.03.2023 r.).

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