

**Strengthening  
the Capacity  
to Counter  
Disinformation**

Belarusian information space

**July-August 2021**



Center for Propaganda  
and Disinformation Analysis



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR  
DEMOCRACY

SUPPORTING FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD

# Introduction

Initiatives related to activities identified in the area of information and psychological influences in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are devoid of analytical component of Russian internal actions (in the Russian information space), which distorts the real picture and scale of hostile actions, hinders forecasting and increases security gaps resulting from coordination of simultaneous, multi-vector Russian operations, calculated to achieve specific goals by impacting on various auditoriums. This project's goal is to spread information about those actions.

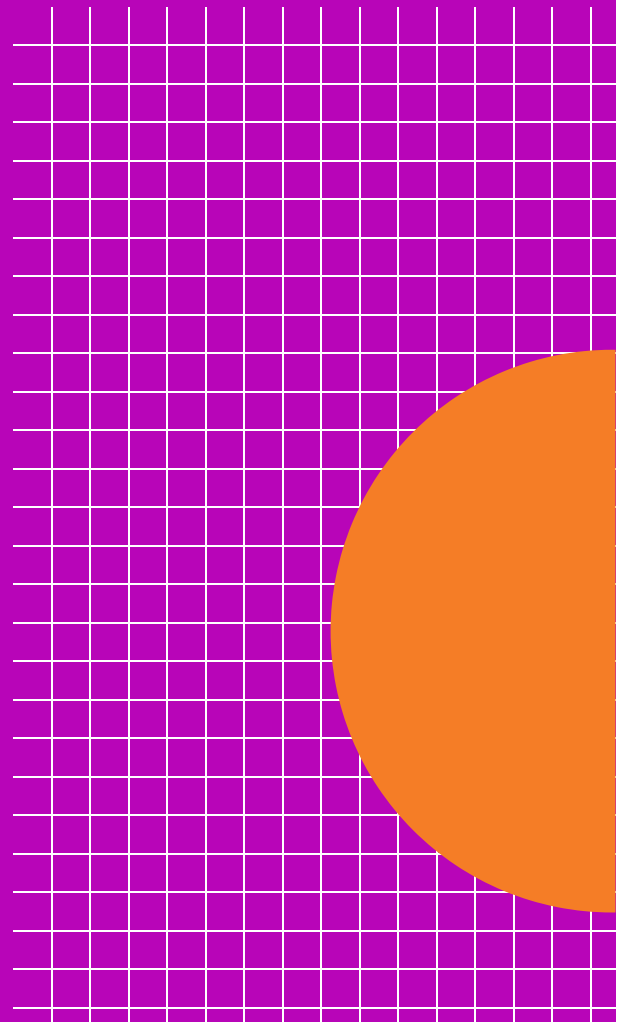
The main activity includes the development of the international Permanent Monitoring and Analyzing Group (PMAG). The main task of the PMAG will be monitoring and analyzing Russian information space in three ways: with the main Russian online media, niche or regional Russian online media as well as Russian social media landscape.

The monitoring and analysis methodology assume the selection of up to 3 main Russian language online media, 3 niche or regional Russian media; the same with regard to Belarusian media online; daily monitoring for information related to Poland, Baltic states, Belarus and Russia; collecting and cataloging of that information by the following categories: Economy, Policy, History, Culture, Other.

# Russia in the Belarusian media online

Monitoring and Analysis  
of Belarusian information  
space in July 2021

Konrad Sztafa



## Monitored media:

[www.belta.by](http://www.belta.by), [ont.by](http://ont.by), [www.sb.by](http://www.sb.by), [interfax.by](http://interfax.by)

## The research results

**Overall number of news items:** 1765 results – 27,8% less than in June (2444 results).

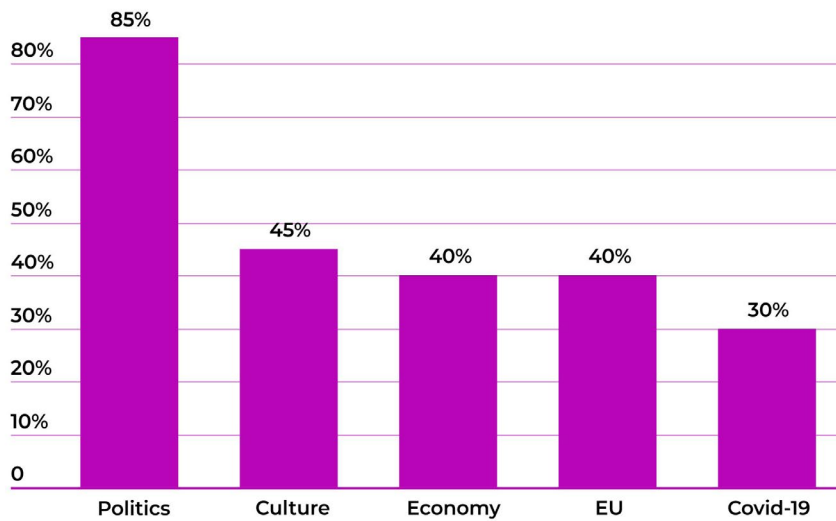
**Main thematic areas:** Politics (80-85%); Culture (40-45%); Economy (40%); EU (30-40%); Covid-19 (20-30%).

**Main trends this month – topics that dominated:** Slavianski Bazaar in Vitebsk (culture, 30-40%. ~20% includes also policy tag since the event was attended by Lukashenko which related to the Union State); Russia in international politics; Union State development (policy, 60-70%); Western sanctions (policy + economics, 30-40%); Belarus economics + cooperation with Russia, China and Asian markets (economics, 40%); Random events in Russia: crimes, natural disasters etc. (N/A, 30-35%); Sport: Tokyo Olympics mostly (20%).

### **What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased:**

- increase: Slavianski Bazaar in Vitebsk (quite often linked to policy tag); Military cooperation with Russia (Zapad 2021) + within CIS region (Collective Security Treaty Organization, ОДКБ); random events in Russia (crimes, natural disasters, death of prominent individuals etc.); Covid-19 situation in Russia (+ no articles for Belarusian Covid-19 situation);
- decrease: Ryaniar-Sapega-Protasevich; CIS countries cooperation, Belarus-Russian regions cooperation;
- constant: Russia in international politics; Russian authorities and officials' comments on Belarus political situation; NATO, Poland, Lithuania as a direct military and hybrid threat to Belarus/Russia's integrity; Western sanctions.

### Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



### The main narrative says that

Belarus and Russian military cooperation is an answer to aggressive NATO movement across Belarusian borders. Western sanctions will not affect Belarus and will only increase the intensity of comprehensive integration with Russia (Union State). **Russia provides military and political support to Belarus. Belarus integrity is also Russia's integrity. The main threat comes from the collective West.**



### What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

**To convince the readers that Belarus is under a threat of foreign powers and an alliance with Russia will ensure its integrity.** To ensure that the readers perceive the collective West as an aggressor (in reference to the aggression against USSR by Nazi Germany).



### What is the impact / how is it to be understood?

Belarus is not going to change its political vector and turn away from Russia.



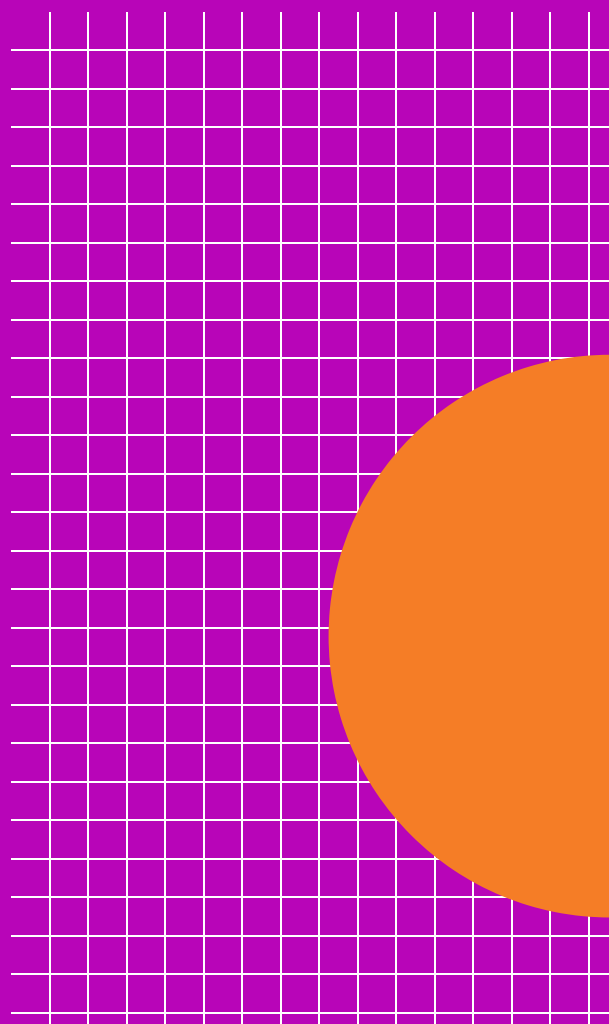
## Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

Focus on cultural and spiritual ties between Russia and Belarus as one of the cornerstones of bilateral integration and prosperity.

# Russia in the Belarusian media online

Monitoring and Analysis  
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Palina Shcherbava



## Monitored media:

belsat.eu, money.onliner.by, tech.onliner.by,  
people.onliner.by, nn.by, www.kp.by, kp.by

## The research results

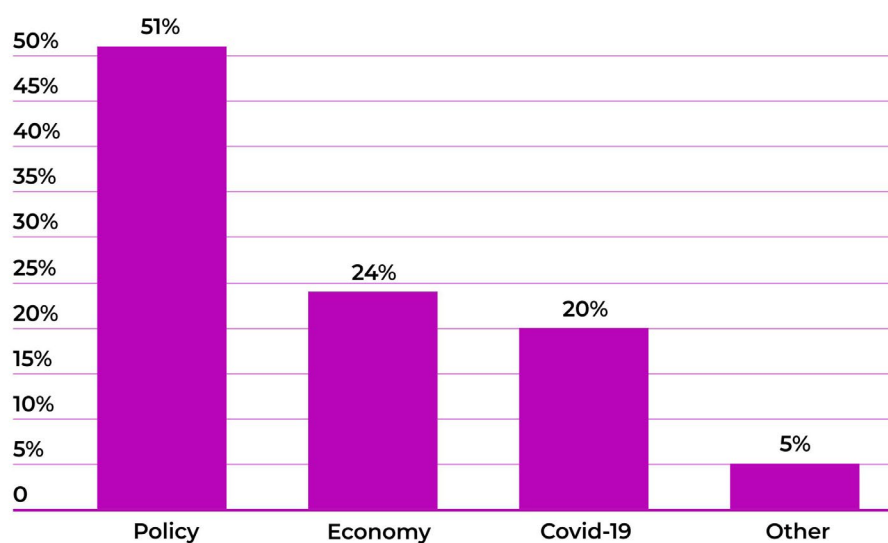
**Overall number of news items:** 384 results – 41,19% less than in June (653 results).

**Main thematic areas:** Policy (51%); Economy (24%); Covid-19 (20%); Other (5%).

**Countries / Entities:** Russia – 233 mentions; EU – 76; NATO – 30.

**Main trends:** Compared to the previous two months of monitoring, the overall number of news items in the niche media in July has significantly decreased. This could be linked to the expanded crackdown on independent media in Belarus that took place during this period. In terms of content, news about politics and economy continued to be predominating among other thematic areas. News about the Coronavirus crisis remained high on the agenda.

### Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis





## The main news subjects and their context

**Belarus – European Union/United States relations:** migrant crisis at the Belarusian border with Lithuania and Latvia; adoption of a new economic sanctions package against Belarus, including the prohibition of transit of EU goods through this state; meeting between US. President Joe Biden and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.

**Russian-Belarusian relations:** Deployment of Russian troops to Belarus in connection with a joint military exercise “Zapad-2021”; further development in Russian-Belarusian integration process; meeting between Putin and Lukashenko in Saint Petersburg; adoption of new economic agreements and a new credit issue to Belarus; extradition of Belarusian opposition activists by Russia despite the ECtHR ban.

**Other subjects:** Coronavirus crisis – Delta variant, adoption of a decree allowing foreign nationals to get vaccinated in Belarus.



## Main narrative

**Compared to previous months, the confrontation between the European Union and the United States on one side and Belarus and Russia on the other in the official narrative has visibly intensified.** Namely, there has been an increased usage of such categorical wording as “hybrid war”, “economic war”, “third world war” while describing EU and U.S. policies towards Belarus and Russia.

**Russia’s image in Belarusian official discourse continued to be exclusively positive.** Both Belarusian and Russian politicians have been constantly quoted talking about the exceptional relationship between the two countries, the common history and destiny of the brotherly nations, as well as the need to jointly confront common enemies.



## Goal / Purpose

**The main goal pursued by the Belarusian state propaganda is to create an appearance of the external threat coming from the EU and the U.S.** To shift the responsibility and blame from Belarusian government for the deep internal political and economic crises that country is currently facing.



## Impact / Consequences

The growing level of hostility towards the EU, the U.S. and the other countries of NATO coalition among part of Belarusian population. Further improvement of Russia's image.



## Examples of disinformation and propaganda

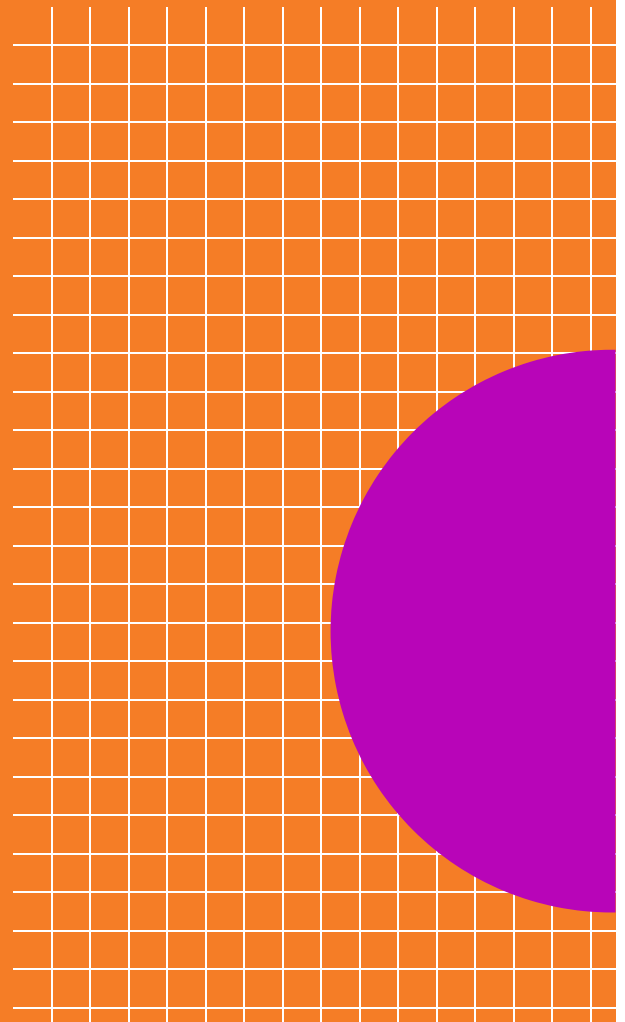
23.07.2021

President of Belarus A. Lukashenka announces threat of the World War III: "By creating here, in the centre of Europe, a centre of horrendous tension, deploying a hybrid war against us and Russia, and against China, the Europeans are leading to the outbreak of World War III."

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## The research results

**Overall number of news items:** 1270 results – 28% less than in July (1765 results).

**Main thematic areas:** Politics (90%); Other (55%); Economy (40%).

**Thematic areas that dominated:** Russia – 1584 mentions; Policy – 1353; N/A – 634; Economy – 538.

**The number of messages with the indication of increases and decreases in relation to the previous month:**

- increase: Other (Afghanistan, Tokyo Olympics, random events in Russia); Economy; Sanctions;
- decrease: Union State development; CIS cooperation; Culture; Ryaniar-Sapega-Protasevich; history; culture.

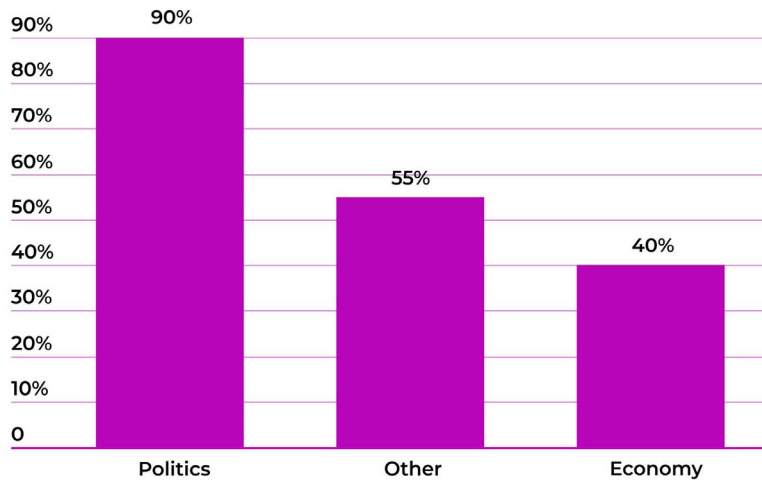
**Main trends this month. What topics dominated – indicate the percentage share (based on tags):**

- The “Big Conversation with the President (Большой разговор с Президентом) – live conference with Lukashenko (60-70%, politics + different tabs);
- Sanctions (30-40%, politics + economy);
- Afghanistan, random events in Russia (other, 40-55%).

**What topics gained, what were constant, and what topics decreased:**

- increase: Russia in International politics (Afghanistan); Sport (out of which approx. 5% concerned the scandal involving Krystsina Tsimanouskaya); Lithuania-Belarus border blockage and Russia’s support;
- constant: military cooperation (ОДКБ, Zapad 2021); economy (Russian-Belarus cooperation; internal Belarus development); anti-Western content (with particular attention to Lithuania and Poland); sanctions; Russia’s economic and political support; Covid-19 situation in Russia;
- decrease: Culture; NATO as a direct military threat; Union State development.

### Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



#### The main narrative says that

Russia is a major player in international politics, and it will lead the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to prevent Taliban from infiltrating the borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS) members. **Belarus is second most important military partner in CSTO. Russia actively participates in Belarus's defense system, which is a separate and special priority for both countries.**



#### What goals do those who spread it want to achieve?

**To prove that Belarus has impact on global politics and it is not internationally isolated.**



#### What is the impact / how is it to be understood?

**In the bilateral alliance with Russia, Belarus remains influential and key country in the CIS region.**



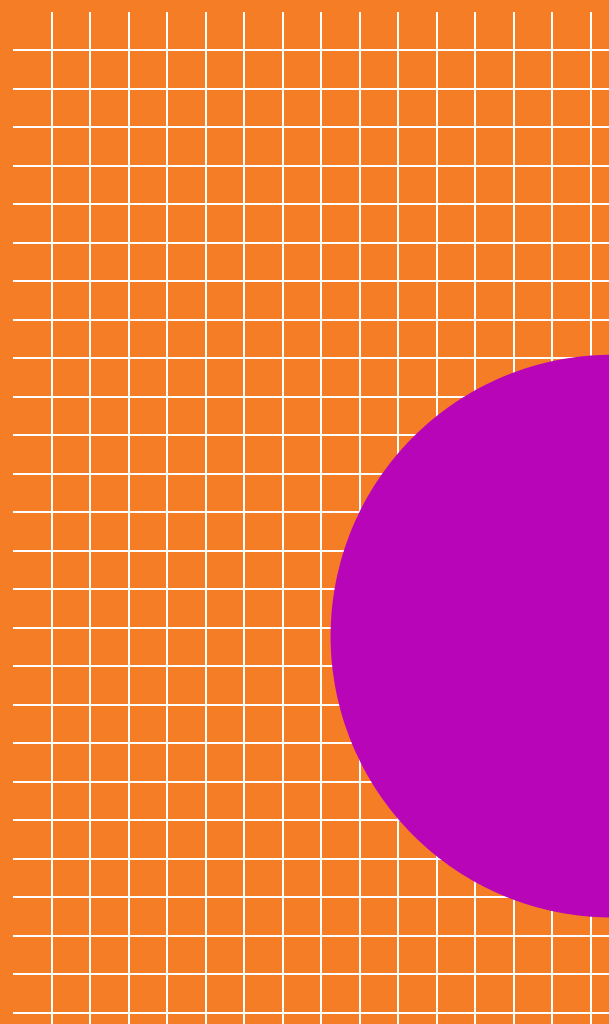
Data / information that is considered the most important in this monitoring period

**Global politics are no longer unipolar, and Russia (so as Belarus) are one of few global power centers.**

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## The research results

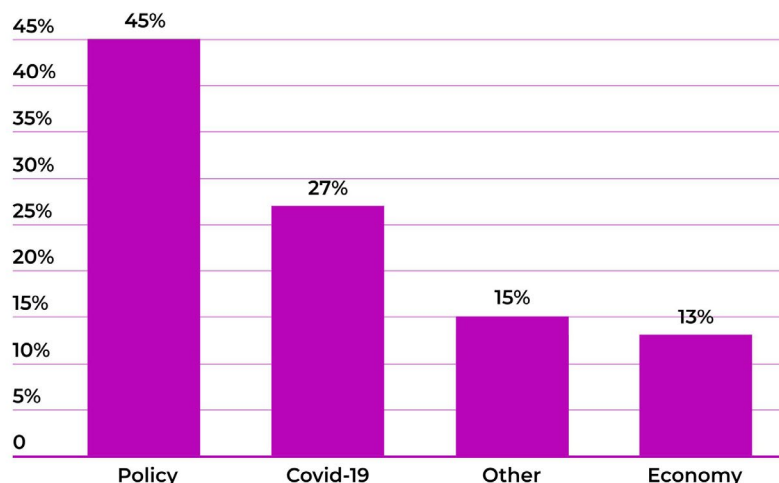
**Overall number of news items:** 285 results – 56% less than in July (653 results).

**Main thematic areas:** Policy (45%); Covid-19 (27%); Other (15%), Economy (13%).

**Countries/Entities:** Russia – 208 mentions; EU – 41; NATO – 22.

**Main trends:** Compared to the previous months of monitoring, the overall number of news items in the niche media in August was the lowest.<sup>1</sup>

### Main thematic areas:



Source: Own elaboration, Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis



### The main news subjects and their context

- **Belarus – European Union/United States relations:** migrant crisis at the Belarusian border with EU; economic sanctions against Belarus and their impact on the country's economy.

<sup>1</sup> This month the monitoring excluded news from the Nasha Niva (nn.by) portal due to its blockage by the Belarusian authorities earlier in July. News about politics and policy continued to prevail among other thematic areas. The amount of news about Coronavirus crisis has noticeably increased.



- **Russian-Belarus relations:** deployment of Russian troops to Belarus as a part of the “Zapad-2021” joint military exercises; Russian-Belarusian integration process; meeting between Putin and Lukashenko in Saint Petersburg; possibility of recognition of Crimea as a part of the Russian Federation by Belarus.

**Other subjects:** Coronavirus crisis; foreign military and diplomatic withdrawal from Afghanistan; Tokyo Olympic games.



### Main narrative

The overall quality of news in the independent niche media became considerably poorer this month. The number of original analytical materials was practically equal to zero. On the other hand, the number of celebrity news and entertainment news as well as reprinted materials has sufficiently increased.

Alexander Lukashenko’s „Big Conversation with the President” press conference was the event that drew the media’s attention the most. **Talking about integration with Russia, for the first time in several months the preconditions were given. Namely, that integration with Russia will not be possible unless equal conditions are created for both countries.** Also, the reluctance to immediately recognize Crimea as part of Russia had been voiced.

**The overall tone in relation to EU countries and the USA remained mainly negative, along with particularly dismissive remarks regarding Lithuania and Ukraine.**



### Goal / Purpose

**The main goal pursued by the Belarusian state propaganda is to create an appearance of the external threat coming from the EU and the U.S.** To shift the responsibility and blame from Belarusian government for the deep internal political and economic crises that country is currently facing.



### Impact / Consequences

The growing level of hostility towards the EU, the U.S. and the other countries of NATO coalition among part of Belarusian population.



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