

Belarus Propaganda Update

*Monthly review of Belarusian propaganda and
Russian propaganda targeting Belarus*

#2. November 2023

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General directions and tendencies

- Internal propaganda is aimed at strengthening presidential power. After the “party purges” that took place in Belarus in October – the liquidation of parties, after which only four pro-government parties remained in Parliament – propaganda channels concentrated on explaining to people the need to destroy the remnants of parliamentary democracy;
- Continuing the direction of strengthening power, the beginning of November was marked by a rise in patriotic rhetoric and Soviet nostalgia in connection with the celebration of the Day of the October Socialist Revolution of 1917 (November 7);
- The growth of anti-Ukrainian sentiments and statements of victory in Belarusian and Russian propaganda continued, connected to a temporary shift in international focus on Ukraine to the background due to events in the Middle East (Israel’s war against Hamas);
- At the same time, propaganda has not only been attacking Ukraine, but was also trying to whitewash the government and reject accusations of the forced transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus for “rehabilitation,” due to the threat of an arrest warrant for Aliaksandr Lukashenka being issued by the International Criminal Court;

- Despite the generally aggressive nature of anti-Ukrainian rhetoric, basing on an analysis of the propaganda statements in November 2023, it cannot be maintained that Belarus is seeking to enter into a war against Ukraine together with Russia. This is also confirmed by the analysis of data on the [military activity of the Belarusian army](#);
- The West, especially the countries on the EU's eastern frontier – Poland and the Baltic states – continues to be one of the main targets of animosity. Since Belarus in a sense joined the club of nuclear powers, the warlike rhetoric of propagandists is now supported by “nuclear bravado”;
- Discrediting Belarusian democratic forces remains one of the main goals of state propaganda;
- Belarusian state propaganda continues to demonstrate its complete dependence on Russian propaganda and operates in accordance with Russian storylines. At the same time, it retains its “regional motifs,” for example, the fight against the Belarusian democratic forces.

Strengthening of state power

After the “purges” that took place in early October, of the fifteen political parties only four fully pro-government parties remained in Belarus. Propaganda efforts were aimed at justifying the need for such a large-scale “party purge” before the upcoming parliamentary elections in February 2024. The main idea is that parties should not interfere, but rather assist the “president.”

The “president” himself [emphasized](#) this: “Belarusian parties will be useful if they can truly represent the interests of their party members before the state, as well as become an assistant to the authorities in explaining and promoting decisions made” (in an interview with *TVR channel*, November 12).

His words were echoed by many. The “politician” Oleg Gaidukevich, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, which is one of the remaining four pro-government parties, [said](#) it most clearly: “We have a lot of active political citizens, especially after 2020. People realized that politics must be dealt with, otherwise they in the West will do it for us and form some ideas here. Therefore, there will be competition... But there will be no fifth column in the elections! Though they will try to infiltrate the elections by pretending to be ordinary people.”

[Gaidukevich again](#) (November 13): “No more marginalized people in the elections – not only in 2024 and 2025, but also in 2030 and 2035! Patriots must nominate presidential candidates!”

The propagandist [Alexei Dzermant](#) (November 14): “We must advance from our own traditions and our political culture, where the main role is played by our leader, the President. And parties should help him determine the best, optimal paths of development, offering certain solutions, projects, promoting necessary laws, collecting feedback, the opinions of citizens, and solving their problems.”

On November 27, the state channel [ONT commented](#) regarding the upcoming elections in which it essentially called for state censorship and to limit the actions of candidates that were not pro-government. “We won, we stopped the rebellion [meaning the suppression of peaceful protests in 2020], and now we must and will impose our media policies. We have a new political line: only supporters of the state should get into Parliament. Only those for whom the words Belarus, Unity, Sovereignty, Family, and Peace have a decisive meaning.”

Lukashenka himself [said](#) in November that Belarus is not a parliamentary, but a presidential republic, and should remain so: “Belarus is a young state. The model we have chosen for governing the country – a presidential republic – is optimal for our society, taking into account historical traditions and the geopolitical situation. People should not only understand this, but accept it as an axiom,” Lukashenka said.

The efforts of propagandists are aimed at strengthening the image of Belarus as a strong, self-sufficient power, headed by a great ruler or even an “emperor.” On November 22, one of the most notorious Belarusian propagandists, Grigory Azarenok, on his social media channel, together with another propagandist Piotr Petrovsky, [remarked](#) the following: “The empire is made up of people of breadth. These are people like Aliaksandr Lukashenka.” “There will be no Europe, because it is destroying itself.” Piotr Petrovsky to this responded: “They tell us: ‘You have a post-imperial complex, a post-colonial complex.’ They do not separate empire from imperialism. The Empire is made up of magnanimous people. These are openhearted people. But they in Europe are small, petty.”

Later, Petrovsky [declared](#) the existence of a kind of “Belarus Empire”: “Yes, historically, territorially and politically this is not true. But take a walk along Independence Avenue [in Minsk]. Look at the greatness, the scale, the flight, the gigantic strength of a great people. By our history, by our spirit, by the depth of our people, and by our President, we are, of course, an Empire.”

Lukashenka also seeks to strengthen his power through threats of nuclear weapons, though he claims these are “not threats.” On November 23, speaking at a session of the Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in Minsk, Lukashenka [said](#) that the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus is not a threat, but “diplomatic etiquette”: “We, and I repeat this for the

hundredth time, are not threatening anyone. We are simply learning 'diplomatic etiquette' from those who made the language of power a global trend." "Only the presence of powerful weapons guarantees security in the region and gives us a voice in the international arena," Lukashenka said.

November 7 and official nostalgia for the USSR

The first half of November was traditionally marked by a rise in Soviet and patriotic rhetoric associated with the November 7 holiday. Belarus remains the only country in the world that continues to officially celebrate the Day of the Socialist Revolution of 1917. Belarus's state media outlets were filled with propaganda claiming that the country should be grateful to the Soviet era for its existence. The November 7 holiday gave a new impetus to nostalgic rhetoric on which the Belarusian mythology is built and continues to exist that "we are no worse off than in the USSR."

"The President preserved the celebration of the Day of the October Revolution so that every year people would remember the date that gave Belarus statehood. Modern Belarus is the direct heir, and legal successor of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic [as part of the USSR]," [writes](#) the state newspaper *SB. Belarus Segodnya*.

Speaking on the Russian channel *Solovyov LIVE* on November 7, propagandist and minister-counselor of the Belarusian Embassy in Russia Alexander Shpakouski [said](#) about Lukashenka's role in Belarus that "history will remember those who took a country without a nuclear power plant and left it with one" (in reference to the famous expression falsely attributed to Winston Churchill regarding Stalin's role in the USSR: "He inherited Russia with a wooden plough and left it in possession of an atomic bomb").

On November 7, propagandist Grigory Azarenok appeared on the channel *STV* with a [pamphlet of pathos](#) that begins with the words "I want to go to a country where..." The pamphlet lists myths about the "good life" in the USSR. The conclusion is this: "Do you know many such countries? I only know one. I look around and see it. It is Aliaksandr Lukashenka's Belarus. Many people call this country the last island of the Soviet Union. They think they're insulting us. But we read the Gospel, and the Last will be the First."

On November 8, the dean of the department of journalism at Belarusian State University Aleksey Belyaev [said](#) that in Soviet times, the "basic principles of the socio-economic policy" of modern Belarus were laid down: "Economic and political turbulence reigns in the world, but Belarus is holding on in difficult conditions, thanks in part to following the principle of social justice set out during the Soviet Union," said Belyaev.



Ukraine

The aggressive propaganda towards Ukraine and Ukrainians continues. After the start of Israel's anti-terrorist operation in the Gaza Strip, propagandists happily note the shift in focus of international attention from the war in Ukraine to the Middle East. The narrative of "the West is ceasing to assist Ukraine" has dominated pro-state media for more than a month now. For example, on November 6, Lukashenka [said](#) that due to the worsening situation in the Middle East, "Ukraine is receding into the background." "Ukraine will still be ours. Nobody needs Ukraine, except for Russia and Belarus. Therefore, this region is our region, in the sense that we will be together," said Lukashenka.

On the same day, Lukashenka's message was picked up by propaganda outlets. On the political talk show "SASS is authorized to declare" on the channel *STV*, dean of the education department of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Belarus Andrei Bogodel [said](#) that Ukraine belongs to the "Russian world": "The war will be lost by Ukraine as a sovereign state – this is beyond any doubt. Maybe it (the war) will be frozen, unfrozen, and go on for decades, but still Ukraine will belong to the 'Russian world.' Because it already belongs to this 'Russian world,'" said Bogodel.

On November 8, a member of the Hungarian Parliament, leader of the radical right wing of Our Homeland Movement, László Toroczkai, [stated](#) on Belarusian television that "the Ukrainian regime is oppressing the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia." "The Hungarians relinquished part of their territory for the sake of peace throughout Europe. And we don't understand why the EU never talks about peace, about the possibilities of a peaceful settlement. They only talk about weapons, about military operations."

Ukrainian children

On November 1, [the Russian Presidential Commissioner for the Rights of Children Maria Lvova-Belova visited Minsk](#). At a public meeting with her in attendance, Russian Ambassador to Belarus Boris Gryzlov said that Belarus and Russia will continue to deport children from Donbass. "If we speak the language of facts, no country or organization in the world has done as much for the safety and well-being of Ukrainian children as Russia and Belarus," said Gryzlov. In March 2023, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Maria Lvova-Belova and Vladimir Putin on suspicion of unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia.

On November 8, several pro-government Telegram channels at the same time [disseminated](#) a fake news story that the First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska is "selling Ukrainian children to pedophiles in the West." The *Nevolfovich*

channel, which is connected to Belarus's Security Council and the Ministry of Defense, wrote that according to an investigation by an unnamed "French anti-corruption foundation," "[t]he Olena Zelenska Foundation, under the guise of a noble mission to save children from the Ukrainian conflict, took dozens of boys and girls from Ukraine, most of whom fell into pedophile networks." The Olena Zelenska Foundation arranges treatment and rehabilitation in European countries for Ukrainian children who have suffered from Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. It is obvious that the propaganda was invented in response to accusations made against Russia and Belarus of unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children.

Defending the right of the Lukashenka regime to illegally bring children from Ukraine, Pavel Evseenko, Belarus's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, at a meeting of the UN Security Council on November 11, said the following: "Belarus is [seriously concerned](#) about the manipulation of the 'children's agenda' at the UN and is extremely disappointed in the politicization of Belarus's humanitarian activities in organizing respite for children from foreign countries in Belarusian health institutions. This issue has become the subject of speculation on the part of some European political and government figures... We reject attempts at malicious distortion of facts and their liberal interpretations," [said](#) Pavel Evseenko.

On November 28, Minister Counselor of the Belarusian Embassy in Russia Alexander Shpakouski [said](#) that Belarus will continue to deport Ukrainian children despite international sanctions and condemnation: "We simply are not listening to these squeals from abroad and will not take them into account... We give these children medicine, shelter, food, time well spent, and friendship. And they [Europe] give them bombs, bullets, and planes."

On November 30, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Yuri Ambrazevich, speaking at a meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Countries of the OSCE in Skopje (North Macedonia), [demanded](#) that the names of children illegally transferred from Ukraine to Belarus be provided. "Concerning the accusations or assumptions made about the forcible transfer or deportation of children from Ukraine, the answer here is very short. Nobody gave us a single name. We are waiting," Ambrazevich said.

Also, in November 2023, Russian "President" Vladimir Putin [awarded](#) the Order of Friendship to the Belarusian pro-government Paralympian Alexey Talai "for his services in strengthening friendship and cooperation between peoples." The Alexey Talai Foundation brings Ukrainian children from the occupied territories of Ukraine to Belarus.

The West, Poland, and the Baltic states

The West's "hostility" towards Belarus remains one of the main propaganda storylines. The main enemies of the Lukashenka regime are still the countries of the EU's eastern frontier and Belarus's neighbors – Poland and the Baltic countries. According to propaganda outlets, they are making plans to seize the western regions of Belarus and are preparing "fugitive traitors" to seize power within the country. Since Belarus has essentially joined the club of nuclear powers, the warlike rhetoric of propagandists has been accompanied by "nuclear bravado."

At the same time, in Lukashenka's addresses to European countries, "mitigating" and even "conciliatory" motives are observed, and offers of friendship "as if nothing had happened" are made along with requests to "forget old grievances and do business as usual."

For example, on November 21, in response to a [statement](#) by the Vice-Speaker of the Polish Senate Maciej Żywno that Warsaw needs to start negotiations with Lukashenka. Member of the House of Representatives of Belarus's National Assembly Sergei Klishevich [stated](#) that Mr. Żywno "sees that Poles want to live normally [with Belarus]. They want to communicate, make friends, trade, and visit one other, as we did before. There is no other choice. Belarusians must be negotiated with at the table, resolve issues, and more or less coexist normally." In his comment, he never mentioned the actual reason for freezing Polish-Belarusian relations, namely the Lukashenka regime's complicity in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

On November 3, speaking in the city of Ostrovets, [Lukashenka said that he did not expect any improvements in Poland's policies towards Belarus after the parliamentary elections held on October 15](#). He called the Law and Justice party "pro-American," and the leader of the opposition party Civic Platform, Donald Tusk, a "pro-European politician." "But this does not mean that tomorrow the policy towards Belarus will change there." "We are a sovereign independent state. We will pursue policies that are in the interests of our people. If they are ready for this, tomorrow we are ready to shake hands with them anywhere and are ready to cooperate with them," Lukashenka said. He also said that he expects relations with Poland and Lithuania to be restored.

On November 11, Lukashenka [congratulated](#) Poland on their National Independence Day. In his address, which was conciliatory in nature, he made several mitigating statements: "Our common past includes a centuries-old common Christian and cultural heritage, broad and friendly contacts between the residents of the two countries. I hope that Warsaw will listen to the voice of its citizens with a call to live in peace and harmony with representatives of all

nations and religions, and will consider the friendly hand of cooperation extended by Belarus.”

That same day, Belarusian Foreign Minister Sergei Aleynik [said](#) in an interview with the state television channel *ONT* that Minsk is open to dialogue with the Polish authorities. At the same time, he accused Poland of taking hostile steps, to which Belarus is “forced to respond”: “We were not the initiators of the deterioration of relations with Poland. We were forced to respond to numerous systemic unfriendly steps taken by the Polish authorities towards Belarus. We have always advocated and continue to advocate for dialogue, but this dialogue must only be mutually respectful and conducted without any preconditions,” Aleynik said.

Also, in November, Lukashenka [congratulated](#) the people of Latvia on the 105th anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Latvia. In his address, he said “Belarusians have always sincerely rejoiced at the successes of their Latvian friends, and have had idols among Latvian cinema and pop figures. And they never dictated to you who to choose as the leader of your country and in what way the country will develop.” “I sincerely wish the Latvian people peace, good prospects, and opportunities to strengthen statehood, without this being at the expense of relations with their neighbors,” Lukashenka said.

Moreover, two weeks earlier, on November 3, the Investigative Committee of Belarus (IC) opened a criminal case under the article “Crimes against Security of Humanity” against “unnamed officials” in Latvia regarding the migration crisis at the border. The official commentary of the Investigative Committee uses propaganda expressions such as “mercenaries in uniform,” “followers of Euro-fascism,” and “punitive battalions of the European Union.” “The lawlessness at the border is due to the tacit consent of officials of the Republic of Latvia, promoting ideas of racial superiority and authoritarianism,” the Investigative Committee [said](#) in a statement.

On November 22, Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus Piotr Parkhomchik, during a speech in Parliament broadcast by state media, [said](#) that “European businessmen are looking for opportunities to return to the markets of Belarus.”

On November 27, Secretary of State of the Security Council of Belarus Aliaksandr Volfovich, in an interview with the state channel *ONT*, [said](#) that Poland and the Baltic countries are not going to attack Belarus. “I think they well-appreciate that unleashing military action against the Belarus, which is a strategic partner of Russia, is probably simply unreasonable and inappropriate.” At the same time, “Minsk sees the situation that is developing on the western borders and the forces and resources that Poland and the Baltic countries have

in their arsenal today,” Volfovich said. According to him, the buildup of armed forces does not indicate that these countries are peace-loving.

Another important storyline for the second year now is the instrumentalization of the migrant crisis on the Belarusian borders with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.

The State Secretary of the Security Council of Belarus Aliaksandr Volfovich [said](#) that Belarus is open to dialogue “on all issues,” but neighboring countries are preventing this. “All our messages and appeals to Poland and the Baltic countries – ‘Let’s talk constructively, including on the topic of migration, to find ways out of this situation, to find ways to resolve it’ – remain unanswered.” He emphasized that “the migration threat does not come from Russia or Belarus.”

Previously, Aliaksandr Lukashenka blamed the migration crisis on the EU, but at the same time [stated](#) that he was “ready to get over this and start negotiating.”

Another important topic for speculation is an ideological historical project construct regarding the supposed genocide of Belarusians during the Second World War. This topic began to be promoted by the Prosecutor General of Belarus Andrei Shved, who in the fall of 2020 wrote a book called “Genocide of the Belarusian People.” In it, he talks about trillions in reparations to Belarus from Germany. Among other things, Shved compares participants of peaceful protests in Belarus in 2020 with the Nazis.

In November 2023, Shved raised this topic at a meeting of prosecutors of the participating states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in China, where he [stated](#) that the investigation into crimes of genocide against the Belarusian people, which began in 2021, is necessary to “prevent the glorification of Nazism.” “The events of 2020 [referring to the peaceful protests of the summer and fall of 2020 and their bloody suppression] showed that our society is not sufficiently aware of the crimes of Nazi Germany,” Shved said. At the same meeting, he stated that “in the policy of the countries of the collective West towards Russia and Belarus, a continuity with the ideas of Nazi Germany is seen.”

“Memory of genocide” is becoming part of the official historical policy of the Lukashenka regime which the authorities are trying to promote in schools. In November, a [presentation](#) of the textbook “Genocide of the Belarusian People during WWII” took place at a school in Minsk.

Belarusian democratic forces

On November 1, one of the main state publications – the newspaper *SB. Belarus Segodnya* – published an article titled [“When the carriage turns into a pumpkin”](#) full of lies about the democratic forces of Belarus and the president-elect Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. The article claims they are looking to disrupt the elections to the National Assembly (“Parliament”) and local executive bodies scheduled for February 25, 2024. The article mentions the head of iSANS Vlad Kobets, calling our organization “a rotten agency that played one of the most vile roles in the events of 2020.”

On November 3, Lukashenka, while speaking to journalists, [said vulgarly](#) he would not release political prisoners, despite western demands. “We talk to them [Western countries] through closed channels and they approach me with some conditions like, ‘Release this or that [prisoner of conscience], let this one go!’” “He broke the law,” continues Lukashenka, “how can I let him go? For this, there must be certain conditions. They kneel on my chest and start making demands. Screw you!”

On November 15, Belarus’s Investigative Committee published an article full of propaganda cliches regarding the “BYPOL case.” BYPOL (Association of Security Forces of Belarus) is an opposition organization. Its officers are [called](#) in the article “polizei and traitors,” “a bunch of fugitive losers,” and “fugitive terrorists.” The defendants in the case were accused of “inciting hatred, calling for mass riots, organizing terrorist acts and other actions aimed at seizing state power.” The article says that the Polish authorities “created an enclave for the criminal world in Europe” by hosting BYPOL.

On November 17, speaking to employees at the Kristall plant in Homel, Aliaksandr Lukashenka [said](#) that only those emigrants who “did not take to the streets” [meaning did not participate in street protests in 2020] can return to Belarus. “Some people from the Homel region fled abroad and are asking to go home. Here is the commission [meaning the so-called “Commission for Return” – an ideological project aimed at returning Belarusians who left the country for fear of political reprisals]. Go and prove that you didn’t kill, didn’t steal, didn’t go out on the street, didn’t vandalize, and we will take you back. But excuse me, if you intimidated our people and are still doing it, you’d better stay there. Don’t come here.”

On November 29, propagandist Piotr Petrovsky called for depriving fugitive opposition members of the right to inherit property in Belarus. “They are traitors to the country, traitors to the state, which means they should not have the right to inherit in Belarus,” Petrovsky [said](#). Azarenok [said](#) in the same

message that opposition representatives “have no right to anything other than prison terms.”

Russian propaganda targeting Belarus

Russian propaganda targeting Belarus is aimed at searching for common, unifying pages in history and modern times between the two countries, while at the same time convincing their audience that Belarus has no independence, that Belarusians are part of the Russian people, and that only nationalists speak Belarusian. The latter narrative is promoted not only by Russian, but also by Belarusian propagandists.

In November, an important “unification” [event took place](#) in Minsk with a monument to the Russian Grand Duke Alexander Nevsky being unveiled at the Russian Embassy. Nevsky has nothing to do with Belarus or Minsk, therefore the construction of the monument is purely ideological in nature and emphasizes the unity of Russia and Belarus.

Archpriest of the Orthodox Church, propagandist, and television presenter Fyodor Povny at the opening of the monument [declared](#) “a uniting of the history of the two countries”: “The inhabitants of White Rus' called themselves Russians, and the princely family of Rurikovich ruled our ancestors as well. Alexander Nevsky became a common symbol for the Soviet peoples of victory over the enemy in the Great Patriotic War.”

On November 17, the Head of the Council of Belarus Natalya Kochanova, speaking at a meeting of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS countries in Bishkek, [said](#) that the Russian language is a national treasure of Belarus. “The great Russian language is a powerful unifying principle for millions of people, an important factor in Eurasian integration, and the common heritage of all peoples of the Commonwealth.”

2023 was [declared](#) the Year of Russian language by the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS countries as a “language of interethnic communication”.

On November 15, the first [meeting](#) of the Russian-Belarusian Expert Advisory Council on History took place in Minsk. The Council is an ideological project of the Union State, which is aimed, among other things, at “countering the falsification of history and related challenges and threats.”

On November 23, the Belarusian Investment Forum was held in Moscow. In an article in the state publication *Rubaltic.ru*, Russian propagandist and senior researcher at the Center for Belarusian Studies at the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences Vselovod Shimov [wrote](#) that “sanctions pressure

from the West is pushing Belarus and Russia further towards rapprochement”: “In the new multipolar world order that is emerging before our eyes, small states like Belarus have to decide on their prevailing foreign policy and foreign economic direction. The choice for Minsk in this situation is obvious, as only Russia is a long-standing and proven partner and reliable ally.”

On November 30, Russian propagandist Sergei Mikheyev [said](#) in an interview with the Belarusian state television channel *ONT* that in the war in Ukraine, “the West has forced the Slavs to kill each other.” “The collective West forced us Slavs to kill each other for our own benefit.” “We ourselves gave the opportunity to our enemies not only to tear us apart, but also to force us to fight each other. Unfortunately, many people are washing their hands behind the scenes... We did not have enough inner wisdom and respect for our own civilization to avoid this.”

In the same interview, Mikheyev [said](#) that the union of Belarus and Russia is a “unique sovereign civilization.”