

Belarus Propaganda Update

Monthly review of Belarusian propaganda and Russian propaganda targeting
Belarus

#4. January 2024

Main storylines and topics of the Belarusian propaganda in January 2024:

Belarus:

- Ideologic preparation for the upcoming elections continues (February 2024). The political field is being cleaned up – the audience is made to believe that elections are “not a struggle for power”. The rhetoric of rallying around Lukashenka is intensified; propaganda creates an artificial personality cult for him.
- The authorities do not abandon their efforts to split and weaken democratic forces. Two such major efforts were recorded in January – an attack on the Coordination Council and media campaign against the European Humanities University.
- Creation of the Joint Russian-Belarusian Commission on History.

Ukraine:

- After intense mutual missile shelling during the New Year holidays, propaganda ignores Ukraine’s casualties and destruction and accuses Ukraine of terrorism after strikes on Russian military infrastructure.
- Serious efforts are still being made to reject the accusations against the Lukashenka regime of deporting Ukrainian children to Belarus.

The West:

- The focus of propaganda remains on Poland.
- Pro-state media is gradually adding the “nuclear blackmail” to their lexicon.
- At the same time, despite the aggressive rhetoric, propaganda does not forget to switch to “peacemaking” rhetoric and claim that Belarus has no enemies.

BELARUS

Preparation for the parliamentary elections (25 February)

At the so called “single election day”, deputies of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly (the Parliament of Belarus) of the eighth convocation and local Councils of Deputies of the twenty-ninth convocation will be elected. Elections are increasingly occupying the focus of attention of the pro-state media. The propaganda has the task of convincing the audience that the elections are held not to compete with the incumbent “president” but to help him win.

For example, the Dean of the Faculty for Journalism of the Belarusian State University Aleksey Beliaev [stated on air of the agency Minsk-Novosti](#) that the task of the political parties in Belarus “is not the struggle for power”:

“Every political party should understand that it does not have the goal of seizing power for power’s sake, as it used to be. The task of a party is constant hard work. It is necessary for those who go to power from parties to realize that this is not an “easy ride” or additional privileges, but additional work. And those who think like this now will be quickly put in their place by life.”

On January 2, deputy-communist Sergei Klishevich announced that a new term is being introduced in Belarus “at the level of legal documents” – “electoral security”. [According to him](#)

“We must think how to further strengthen our system so that such populists, clowns or simply foreign agents cannot penetrate our socio-political field and somehow influence the development of our state.”

Lukashenka himself stuttered publicly several times about “his own” presidential election in 2025. It is obvious that this topic concerns him more and more each month. “The president” clearly strives to avoid mistakes of the past, particularly, not to give the opposition an excuse to reproach himself at least for the bad economy. Hints that 2024 will be a special year have already been heard several times in his speeches in January.

On January 4, he [claimed all over again that 2024 will be “special”](#). The reason, of course, is 2025 presidential election:

“Tension will be enormous: everyone is preparing for the presidential election in Belarus – both in the East and in the West”.

He also said this in his valedictory speech to the new economy minister (“[It will be tough this year](#), but not because the current president wants to continue to be a president”) and [to the new health minister](#) (“I will emphasize once again: such actions on my part [staff rotation] will be continued in the near future, up to the presidential election. To avoid any kind of vacillation and some kind of equilibrium in the media here”).

Because the “year will be special”, propaganda increasingly tries to romanticize and even sacralize the image of Lukashenka. They almost speak about him as a “saint” or a “savior” of Belarus. And here again, Grigory Azarenok’s raptures are the loudest and most aggressive.

On Epiphany (January 19) in his program *Tainye pruzhiny politiki* [Secret Springs of Politics] (STV) this young, but perhaps the most famous propagandist of Belarus [gave such an “instruction” to the believers](#):

“...the year’s epiphany frosts are strong. The ice of our statehood is strong. Bind all the sea creatures in it. And consecrate the water. Turn to the West and say – I renounce you, Satan, all your deeds, your lying lust, your abomination, your democracy, all your servants, your demonic pride, your dirty intrigues, your filthy luxury, your bloody money, I am not afraid of all your creeps, I believe in the Lord and the president. And dive in”.

*“[The sanctity of presidential power](#). And no matter how liberoids and marasmatics crooked their demonic faces - it is so. ... **The Third Rome is Holy Russia**. And its capital today is Belarus. We did not fall into the heresy of Westernism, did not sell our primogeniture for lentil soup. **The Holy Land**. And its Leader is the one who holds back the world’s evil”.*

*“[We confront ghouls, murderers, pedophiles, ritual satanists](#). Therefore, the President of Belarus in this battle is not just a post. **He is the Leader of the Christ’s Host. Captain of the Ark of Salvation. He holds the world evil over the nation”.***

“[The State has prioritized culture](#). Everything according to the Gospel. Belarus is the Upper Room of the Kingdom of Heaven”.

All of this could be written off as fanaticism of Azarenok himself, but other public figures also speak out in a similar vein. Archpriest of the Belarusian Orthodox Church Fiodar Povny, who is called Lukashenka’s “confessor”, put the “president” in the same row with prophets on air [on the TV channel Belarus-1](#):

«All of us should learn from Alexandr Grigorievich. What he says today, is often as a prophecy. I may be reproached at some points in what I am saying now, but his life experience, his experience as a leader of the country is a gift, you can’t learn this”.

The Head of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Belarus [Vladimir Gusakov thinks](#) that Lukashenka could be nominated for Nobel Peace Prize, but his chances are poor, because the Nobel prize is “highly politicized and even privatized by Americans”.

Nuclear weapon

The topic of the Tactical nuclear weapon (TNW), that the Lukashenka regime received from Russia, continues to be broadly exploited by the propaganda in discussing international issues. The propaganda accuses the West of the deployment of the TNW in Belarus. The main storyline of the state TV channels is “deterrence” of the Western aggression, however the temptation to rule the world with nuclear blackmail is increasingly common in the statements of commentators on political talk shows.

When discussing the new military doctrine of Belarus on the air of the state TV channel ONT, Officer of the [General Staff of the Armed Forces of Belarus Andrei Bogodel stated the following](#):

*“Another important aspect that was not present in the previous doctrine is the immediate threat. This is the point that gives us all **the right to strike a preemptive strike against the enemy** when war is already inevitable. As Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin used to say, if a fight is inevitable, strike first.”*

He is [echoed by Dmitry Ryabikhin](#), deputy head of the Defense Ministry’s Department of International Cooperation:

“First – this was a necessary measure. Second – it is not a deployment, but the return of TNW to the territory of Belarus. This all must be considered in the mix. We, the military, see this as the means of strategic deterrence. But this is a guarantee of our national security and collective security in the framework of the Union State”.

Andrei Mukovozchik, columnist of the newspaper *Belarus Segodnya*, [considers possibilities for use of the TNW](#):

*Our society must be internally ready for this, because only this way it is possible to stop those who do not like the sovereignty and independence of our country. Belarusians should learn the lessons of the past not to repeat mistakes. **And at the same time, we are still ready to extend a hand of good neighborliness even to our most ardent enemies, remembering that a bad peace is always and everywhere better than a quarrel.***

In general, the manner to change from belligerent intimidation to a “conciliatory” tone and “extend a hand of good neighborliness” is the main difference between the Belarusian and Russian propaganda. The latter has been operating only in one direction for many years now – escalation and “raising the stakes” – and has long been regarded by experts as continuation of military action by information methods.

Here are typical examples of “mitigating” motives in the statements of Belarusian “hawks.” [The above-mentioned officer of the General Staff Bogodel](#):

*I repeat **we do not consider anyone to be an enemy, not any nation.** This is all so that everyone understands what we are ready for. We are ready to defend our country.”*

Deputy Defense Minister Viktor Gulevich:

[“We do not treat any nation as our enemy.](#) And those leaders who maintain negative rhetoric against our country, let them study our Military Doctrine after it is published.” „[We are ready to renew a pragmatic dialogue](#) under the condition that the aggressive rhetoric and actions against us are abolished.”

On January 18, Lukashenka held a meeting with the leadership of the Council of Ministers, during which [he underlined that all decisions should be made because “Russia and Belarus are sovereign independent states”](#), while „any changes, innovations should be remembered first of all about sovereignty and independence”. „The system is a joint one, similar to each other, but there must be two sovereign, independent states”, said Lukashenka. He also said about the absolute groundlessness of “certain statements” that Belarus was allegedly losing its independence. “All sorts of claims and writing (I just read a review that “that’s it, Belarus is losing its sovereignty”) ... We are not losing anything. You see that on this

sovereign territory, which belongs to our people, only we make decisions and act only in conditions that are favorable for us”, his press service quotes.

Propaganda news

On January 12, Lukashenka took the advantage of the Orthodox New Year to give instructions once again to various professional groups. He did not neglect the workers of the propaganda media either:

“Journalists and experts must work almost in a combat situation. We do not have yet (although we talk about it often) an information war. Not yet. We must do everything possible to prevent it. But there is a brutal confrontation. It starts always and everywhere with internal confusion, and this is accompanied by information confrontation and information warfare.”

While speaking to journalists “the president” [warned them](#):

*“Be very careful and cautious. Remember: we are walking on a thin ice. The word today is very important, and it must hit the target, in a certain direction, but it must be very careful and cautious. And it must not be overdone. **The word and facts are our main weapons in the fight for spirituality, traditional values, and true meanings**”.*

Apparently, Lukashenka did not manage to consolidate the opinion on the information warfare with his state officials, because after several days his [Minister of Information Vladimir Pertsov spoke that the media works in „conditions of an information war” in Belarus](#). Therefore

“The activity of editorial offices in general and of each journalist in particular must be verified, clear and prompt”. “Where we are not there, our opponents will be there. ... During the election campaign, they will try to take advantage of any situation to bring their “alternative” information to the citizens, twisting it to their own advantage informationally and ideologically.”

On January 5, [the Ministry of Culture of Belarus announced a competition for scripts of films and TV series](#) for their production in 2025. One of the possible topics, for which the Ministry is collecting applications, is “**heroism of law enforcement officers during the events of August 2020 in Belarus**” – meaning brutal crackdown on political protests of 2020.

Union Media Holding

On January 22, the State Secretary of the so called “Union State” of Russia and Belarus Dmitry Mezentsev [announced to the journalists that a draft project on creation of a unified media holding is ready](#):

*“It is planned to create a single media company of the Union State, which will take over the coordination and ensure the release on the pages of printed publications, TV channels and Internet resources the content and information that will be not only related to the interaction in the formats of the Union State. **It will be about our history our plans, about how we are responding to the pressure, including mental pressure**”.*

On January 31, the Minister-Counselor of the Embassy of Belarus to Russia and the prominent propagandist Aliaksandr Shpakouski told TASS that the media holding of the Union State should be launched in the beginning of 2025, and now the respective ministries of both countries must prepare the statute and register the legal entity. [Shpakouski thanked all participants of the establishment of media holding](#) for their „joint fruitful work“:

“Currently we are at the beginning of the path. Maybe, years will pass, and we will be able to proudly tell the people, how the information shield of Belarusian-Russian Union was forged”.

On the air of the program “*Nichego lichnogo*” [Nothing personal] by Marat Markov (ONT) the pro-state political scientist [Andrei Lazutkin voiced expectations that the joint media holding should “work more on the outer loop”](#):

“We set the task to work on Ukraine, on Poland, on the U.S. and then our TV channels work it off”.

At the same time on the air at Grigory Azarenok the notorious propagandist of RT (former *Russia Today*) Konstantin Prydybailo [spoke harshly about the quality of the Union broadcasting company’s “product”](#):

“...sometimes I am angry because the content we see right now is beyond criticism! In current situation I act as the oppositional or a liberal. I just want to spit and say: “Guys, where does the state money go? I mean the Union State money.”

History at the service of the propaganda

On January 25, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Republican Council for History Policy under the Lukashenka administration and Interdisciplinary Commission for Historical Education under the President of Russian Federation, which foresees the creation of a Joint Russian-Belarusian Commission for History.

The [iSANS expert stated in his comment for Reform.by](#) that the main task of this Commission is not the defense of historical truth, but unification of Belarusian-Russian history:

“Several pro-Russian foundations and various organizations of historical orientation have been operating in Belarus for a long time. The creation of the commission, which will include their representatives, will legitimize their activities at the official high level and increase their influence”. Moreover, authors of any scholarly works and publications that contradict the “unified” view of history may be subject to pressure from the commission, the comment of the iSANS reads.

Exploitation of the “genocide” topic

In previous months we have been following how the Lukashenka regime exploits the topic of the “genocide against Belarusians” during the period of WWII 1941-1945. In its [reviews](#) the iSANS gave examples of how the topic of “genocide” is used in anti-

western and anti-Ukrainian propaganda. In early 2024, another significant step was made in this direction – the concept of “genocide” was expanded to include all Soviet citizens. On January 27, the 80th anniversary of lifting the Leningrad siege, [Lukashenka and Putin unveiled “a memorial for remembrance of peaceful citizens of USSR – victims of the Nazi genocide during the Great Patriotic war”](#) in Leningrad Oblast. In their speeches, both so called “presidents” spoke about the “genocide of Soviet people”.

THE DEMOCRATIC FORCES OF BELARUS

Supporters of the democratic change in Belarus remain one of the main targets of propaganda. The main efforts are aimed at weakening and splitting within the opposition. In January, two such serious attempts were visible – inciting conflict among the political exiles and media attack on the European Humanities University in Vilnius.

On January 10, the propagandist of the state TV channel ONT Igor Tur in his TV show “*Budet dopolneno*” [More to come] [accused political exiles](#) Andrei Yahorau, Valery Sakhshchik and Vadzim Prakopyeu of an attempt to organize “*an opposition coup d’état in the destructive diasporas of Vilnius and Warsaw.*” [According to Tur](#), “conspirators” were counting on redistribution of power within the opposition so that the “instant idol” Tsikhanouskaya would remain nominal leader but would come under control of the Coordination Council. In addition, [he claims](#) that the opponents don’t even try to counter Lukashenka, and the Office of Tsikhanouskaya is ready for a dialogue with him, “*because if Aliaksandr Grigorievich and the West will agree, Tsikhanouskaya, Viacorka and their circle will keep their exile dictatorship until 2030, because the West doesn’t count on the upcoming elections in Belarus. And this would mean 6 years of stable grants and careless existence*”.

Attack on the European Humanities University

In January, the expert’s attention was drawn to a media campaign against the European Humanities University (EHU) – an international university in Vilnius, the majority of which are students with Belarusian citizenship. The campaign emerged based on rumors that the University will cooperate with the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (OST). [The same Igor Tur \(ONT\) wrote that the reason for such cooperation is “money”](#):

“Protest in the facility, where they teach how to professionally protest. Attempts of the European Humanities University in Vilnius to enter cooperation with the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya become more and more scandalous. The motive, as usual, money –this way it is easier to get grants. An ordinary people, as usual, will suffer – cooperation with the office, which is recognized extremist organization in Belarus, instantly turns all students into accomplices”.

Tur stated that the recognition of the EHU an “extremist organization” is only a „matter of time”.

The attack was [supported by Azarenok](#). Whole 15 minutes on the air of his TV show “*Tainye pruzhiny politiki*” [Secret springs of politics] on STV, he condemned the EHU and called these news „*personal history of the oppositional gay games at the EHU*”.

Other propagandists also made comments, in particular, [Maryia Petrashko, propagandist of the TV channel Belarus-1](#):

“Money is gone, but there are scandals and discord among fugitives, which includes an education facility in Vilnius with dubious reputation – EHU.”

At the same time the state TV channel ANT [started to promote the topic of how bad it is to study in the West and how “overrated”](#) the education there is, telling, for example, about “fake scientific research and political repression in U.S. universities”.

Threats to the relatives of the political exiles and attempts to return “departees.”

In January, against the background of another wave of arrests of family members of political prisoners and former political prisoners, Lukashenka’s new threats to the relatives of political exiles remaining in the country sounded extremely alarming. On January 25, in his welcome speech to the newly appointed Minister of Health, the so called [“president” hinted that he should not even think of going abroad](#):

“A dedicated man, a professional, a statesman. So that he would not sit in his post and did not look at a neighboring country looking for a quicker way to escape – for more money or something else. We have started to deal with this. We have some fugitives sitting in the West, and here relatives and others are doing what they did before. Only in secret. We see this and are taking measures to counter it”.

However, despite threats and hostile rhetoric, the authorities keep trying to return political refugees to their homeland. On January 26, [Lukashenka approved the “Concept of migration policy for 2024-28”](#), which, among other things, extends by one year the term of the so-called “commission of return”. According to the organizer’s plan, Belarusian citizens willing to return to the homeland, who “committed administrative offenses or crimes related to significant socio-political events in the period from January 1, 2020, to February 8, 2023,” in other words - participants of political protests in 2020, forced to leave the country, can apply to the commission.

[iSANS already drew the attention](#) to the fact that the “commission” is nothing but the ideologic project of the Belarusian KGB which aims to lure protesters back into the country with false promises and intimidation.

The [“Concept” proposes other measures to stimulate the return of Belarusians](#) to the country, such as, for example, some informational campaigns “about employment opportunities in Belarus”.

On January 15-16, the president-elect of Belarus Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya attended the World Economic Forum in Swiss Davos. State mass media was hesitant in commenting on the issue but used all resources to diminish the significance of the event. The [propagandist of ONT Gleb Lavrov dedicated the issue of his project Za granycy](#) [Behing the limit] and stated that this year the event is “not satisfying”, the forum “failed”, and the representatives of the West couldn’t agree. [Yuri Uvarov, columnist of Minskaya Prawdа, called the WEF](#) “one of the gatherings of globalists, who over a glass of champagne imposingly share their painful thoughts about the need to utilize humanity”, and the main result was “an increase in the degree of Russophobia and hatred against Belarus”.

UKRAINE

Regarding Russian military aggression against Ukraine, the position of Belarusian propagandists does not change and follows the main Russian anti-Ukrainian narratives. They ignore or even openly gloat about casualties or destruction in Ukraine, but at the same time they are indignant at the news about another successful operation of Ukrainian military drones on the territory of the Russian Federation. This was the case in January, after the large-scale mutual New Year's Eve shelling, which began on December 29, 2023. The propaganda did not react to the attacks on Ukrainian cities, but after the shelling of Belgorod, they [immediately began calling for the destruction of the "leadership" of the "terrorist state of Ukraine."](#)

On January 22, 2024, the city center of Donetsk was hit, which resulted in deaths of over twenty peaceful citizens. [Ukraine announced it is not striking on its own territory](#) and such actions are only possible from Russia "to slow down Western deliveries of weapons to Ukraine". Russia, naturally, called shelling on Donetsk an "act of terrorism of the Ukrainian Armed Forces". Belarusian propaganda also reacted. The Chairperson of the Upper House of the Parliament Natallia Kochanova [expressed her condolences to her Russian colleague](#) Valentina Matvienko, condemning the Ukrainian side for "ongoing attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure in the Russian Federation" (e.g., by indirectly recognizing Donetsk as Russian territory).

And after the destruction of the Il-76 military transport plane in the sky over the Russian city of Belgorod on January 24, the [Belarusian state media practically without changes rebroadcast the version of events presented by the Kremlin](#) - for example, the statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry accusing Kyiv of committing a terrorist act and calling the Ukrainian authorities a "neo-Nazi dictatorship" and "the criminal regime of Zelensky, nurtured by the United States and its NATO satellites".

The pro-government authors offer to the attention of the Belarusian reader articles, which state that the true culprits of the tragedy are Ukraine and Western countries.

[Dzmitry Shamko](#):

"This inhumane atrocity once again confirms that for the Ukrainian regime and its handlers in the West there are no boundaries on the way of committing heinous crimes, murders, terrorist attacks and violence <...> In the current situation, the West is silent at the moment, apparently developing again its own unified version of what happened and tactics of reaction to the undeniable facts."

On January 10, the State Secretary of the Security Council of Belarus Aliaksandr Volfovich visited the Border Guards in Mozyr, where he accused Ukraine of increasing tensions at the border:

"Ukrainian border Guards are often drunk on duty, aim their rifles at the territory of Belarus, allow themselves to walk into our territory and breach our airspace with quadcopters".

At the same time [Volfovich did not forget to include the propaganda refrain](#) that Belarusians and Ukrainians were and remain "brotherly nations", but Ukraine has become "a bargaining chip of the collective West".

Ukrainian children

Propaganda remains very sensitive to the “children” topic and tries to refute the accusations of complicity in illegal transfer of Ukrainian children. State media publishes material with sweet descriptions of wonderful relaxation of the “children from Donbas” in Belarus.

[Lyudmila Gladkaya, propagandist of the newspaper *Belarus Segodnya*](#) (January 1):

“These days, we took sweet presents to the children of Donbas from Belarusians. Children read poems, made wishes, and it is clear what they wished for. And they believe in the power of good. This is the tenth New Year in the wartime for these children. Let the next one be peaceful. Like in Belarus. Our president, his team, law enforcers, and each of us tried to keep life in Belarus peaceful and safe”.

On January 9, the state TV channel *Belarus-4* announced, that a group of children from the Ukrainian town of Anthracite, occupied by Russian troops, was sent by the authorities to Belarusian security forces for excursion and training. According to their [information](#), Ukrainian children were taught the basics of life safety and behavior in extreme situations at the Mahilou Regional Safety Center of the Ministry of Emergency Situations. Propagandist [Grigory Azarenok described the presence of the group as follows](#):

“How beautiful life is... Children from Luhansk region say goodbye to Belarus. They are returning home. In Mahilou region they got healthy, visited the Motherland of Batka [nickname of Aliaksandr Lukashenka], ate, played, were happy. Some of them were bought a corset, others a hearing aid. Damn you, Banderites - children’s killers.”

WESTERN COUNTRIES

Propagandists continue to follow the political situation in Poland very thoroughly, deliberately emphasizing the alleged lack of independence of the Polish authorities and pointing out that in fact Poland has no independence and the confrontation in it is between the USA and Germany. For example, on January 12, the newspaper [Belarus Segodnya \[Belarus Today\] published an article by pro-governmental “expert” Aliaksandr Tyshchenko, which said](#):

“...and in fact, in the streets of Warsaw, Sharp’s methodology and the manifesto “Mein Kampf” are now clashing. Yes, it is the American sixes who are now trying to take post-election revenge on the German ones. It is not really the Polish parties that are fighting there, but the interests of Washington and Berlin.”

The [author believes that the most important condition for improving the situation in the country](#) is for the new government to resume dialogue with its “neighbors” (i.e., Russia and Belarus):

“The only thing that will save Poland from a destructive internal conflict is Scholz’s political miscarriage and Tusk’s political will. True, without normalization of relations with neighbors in the eastern direction, this will not improve the situation, but only suspend the state metastasis.”

The topic of “non-independence” of the Western countries was also developed by the Colonel of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Belarus and private guest of the political talk shows of the state channels Andrei Bogodel, who [claimed that „Lithuania is occupied”, because „there are bases for NATO troops”](#):

“Bases are being built in Pabradė and Rukla and additional military towns are being built everywhere with the aim to deploy Americans and Germans. Let's see – sometimes you look in tiktoks and they show [road signs that] say “Minsk (occupied by the Kremlin)”. Why do they think we are occupied? We have the Union State. Let's read the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, and it is clearly written, deployment of military bases of foreign countries is prohibited on the territory of Lithuania. So, who is occupied by whom?”

During the meeting with his generals on January 23, Aliaksandr Lukashenka attacked neighbors yet another time:

“...we are in a special situation: in the South there is war, in the West – Poland and Lithuania, the Baltic States are even worse”.

He [underlined](#) “nothing can be missed on the border”, urged the military to be vigilant and advised “to aim” at the units of the U.S. and Germany, that participate at the military drills in Lithuania.

iSANS continues to monitor the main storylines of the Belarusian propaganda in 2024.