



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
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INDEX

OF BELARUS-UKRAINE RELATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Relations between Belarus and Ukraine are currently at their lowest point in the history of their bilateral interactions. Following the involvement of the Lukashenka regime in Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, nearly all forms of interstate interaction have been diminished to a historical minimum. Such a situation should not be seen as a norm for nations with a rich and intertwined history, centuries-old proximity, similar geopolitical realities shaped by larger neighboring powers, and close cultural, linguistic, economic, and interpersonal connections. Bridging this tragic gap and restoring good neighborly relations is a task that Ukrainians and Belarusians will need to undertake together, no matter how daunting it may appear from today's perspective.

This study, conducted by a joint Belarusian-Ukrainian group of experts with the support of the Free Belarus Center, aims to help evaluate and record the current state of relations between Belarus and Ukraine. The authors also propose a methodological tool to track the dynamics of these relations through annual Index assessments. We anticipate that an objective assessment of the level of this relationship will be valuable not only to Belarusian and Ukrainian politicians and civil society organizations but also to our colleagues in the expert and academic communities, both within and beyond Belarus and Ukraine.

We hope this work will make its modest contribution to the future restoration of relations between Ukraine and Belarus. Acknowledging the need for a starting point, we are saddened—yet not disheartened—by the current low state of bilateral relations.

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this Index is to assess the current state of relations between Ukraine and Belarus. To accomplish this, the full range of interactions has been divided into five categories: political relations, security cooperation, economic ties, cultural and educational connections (including media), and societal relations.

This assessment relied on a survey that gathered insights from a range of respondents—officials from state structures¹, active politicians, members of the Belarusian democratic forces, civil society representatives, volunteers, and experts from both Ukraine and Belarus. Bringing together such a diverse group aims to provide a well-rounded perspective on the relationship's status and to indicate where more proactive efforts may be beneficial.

The survey divided respondents into three main groups: academic and expert communities ("experts"), law enforcement agencies from both nations ("law enforcers," distinct from repressive state "siloviki"), and political figures ("politicians"). Each group responded to 20-25 questions on various cooperation topics, which covered state-level issues as well as practical matters that impact the everyday lives of citizens. Responses were rated on a scale from 1 (indicating the lowest level of relations) to 5 (the highest level), and ultimately, 28 surveys were completed.

To calculate the Index score, we derived an average score for all responses (the "Index Value") and an average for each of the five thematic categories. To avoid skewing the results, extreme scores were omitted when they represented less than 5% of total responses.

Besides the questionnaire, we conducted nine semi-structured interviews with participants from key areas of cooperation: policy, security, and research. The qualitative analysis that follows includes insights summarized from these interviews. When an expert's words are quoted directly, they are marked with quotation marks to maintain clarity.

¹ In the current situation the interviewing of representatives of official state structures of Belarus is unfortunately not possible and has not been conducted

1. POLITICAL RELATIONS

INDEX VALUE: **1,53**

The current state of Ukrainian-Belarusian relations is best described as teetering between poor and dire. The trends are discouraging: Ukrainians, on the whole, view Belarus as a co-aggressor in the context of the war, while the official Belarusian stance — and a substantial part of Belarusian society — tends to attribute the situation to external factors and the actions of Ukraine, which they believe contributed to the escalation. Experts note pervasive frustration and disappointment on both sides. Ukrainians express dissatisfaction not only with Lukashenka but also with the actions of Belarusian democratic forces, while Belarusian expectations often surpass the actual level of engagement and support coming from Ukraine.

Prior to 2014, relations between Belarus and Ukraine were notably better, though they were often grounded in mutual misconceptions than in a genuine understanding of each other. Since 2014, and particularly following Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022, "the pendulum has swung from one distortion to another," with illusions of friendly ties giving way to disappointment — and, at times, animosity. However, the absence of open military conflict offers some hope that relations may improve over time. Despite present tensions, the two nations remain historically and culturally connected, with a shared understanding that their relationship will eventually need rebuilding. Ironically, a limited understanding of each other's realities may serve as a "blank slate" in helping Belarusians and Ukrainians find common ground in the near future.

OFFICIAL POLITICAL RELATIONS

INDEX VALUE: **1,30**

Official interstate relations between Belarus and Ukraine are on the verge of rupture. The trend towards deterioration began already after the presidential election in Belarus in August 2020, following the results of which Ukraine announced a temporary suspension of relations at the highest and high level.²

In 2022, after Russian troops invaded Ukraine from the territory of Belarus, the relations between the states changed dramatically. If earlier Lukashenka was perceived rather in a neutral-positive way (significant export of goods from Belarus to Ukraine played its role), after February 2022 he became associated with aggression, which made it impossible to maintain official ties with the Ukrainian side at the previous level. The question of whether it is possible to restore these relations if Lukashenka remains in power after the end of hostilities remains unanswered.

Diplomatic relations have been minimized, but they have not been officially severed. The Ukrainian embassy continues to work in Belarus, but since July 2023 the status of the Ukrainian representation has been reduced to the level of chargé d'affaires. The consular section of the

Ukrainian embassy also continues to work. It is in charge of protecting the rights of political prisoners who are Ukrainian nationals, protecting the rights of Ukrainian refugees who fled the war through Russia and ended up in Belarus, issuing certificates of identity in case of loss of documents and other issues of the rights of Ukrainians in Belarus. The Belarusian embassy in Ukraine actually ceased its work in March 2022, and in October 2023, Belarusian Ambassador to Ukraine Ihar Sokal was dismissed from his post. This level of diplomatic representation allows maintaining minimal contacts at the technical level, which makes it possible to keep limited ties with official Minsk and is important for solving consular and other practical issues. It is worth noting that this level minimizes public displays of hostility at the official level. In the autumn of 2024, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry addressed two notes to its Belarusian colleagues, urging them not to give in to Russia's desire to draw Belarus into a war against Ukraine.

The relations between the heads of state are extremely tense. There are no contacts between Aliaksandr Lukashenka and Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the highest official level; both resort to harsh public rhetoric towards each other. According to experts, Lukashenka hoped that Ukraine would "turn a blind eye" to his participation in the aggression, but it did not happen. Official statements of the Foreign Ministries, state border services, military and other governmental bodies of both countries can be sharp and even aggressive. At the same time, both official Kyiv and official Minsk seek to avoid direct escalation and the opening of a second front on the border with Belarus, while maintaining a cautious position in the practice of real relations. Relations between the parliaments have historically been underdeveloped, largely due to the highly centralized nature of the Belarusian political system, where power is almost fully concentrated in the executive branch. Under current conditions, these inter-parliamentary relations are virtually non-existent:

"As for relations at the level of parliaments, again, there is no dialogue here. On the contrary, there is a decrease in the legal framework, cooperation between governments and states. Ukraine regularly withdraws from bilateral agreements with Belarus."

While noting the almost complete absence of official relations, all respondents emphasize the presence of hidden unofficial contacts, in particular on the level of secret services.

Direct participation of Belarus in the military aggression or repeated use of the Belarusian territory by Russian troops for a new invasion or a massive strike against Ukraine can become a starting point for even greater deterioration of relations. In this case, according to experts' forecasts, for its defense Ukraine may strike "legitimate targets" on the territory of Belarus and will not sort out "by insignia or chevrons, whether you are Belarusian or Russian."

In the same vein, the statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine on August 25, 2024, regarding the unfriendly actions of the Republic of Belarus directly states that, if necessary for self-defense, "all concentrations of troops, military facilities, and supply routes on the territory of Belarus will be legitimate targets for the Armed Forces of Ukraine."³

From that moment, it would be possible to talk about the beginning of war between Belarus and Ukraine, which has been avoided so far.

² <https://belarus.mfa.gov.ua/spivrobotnictvo/346-politichni-vidnosini-mizh-ukrajinoju-ta-bilorussyu>

³ Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine regarding the unfriendly actions of the Republic of Belarus. Published on August 25, 2024. <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/zayava-mzs-ukrayini-shchodo-nedruzhnih-dij-respubliki-bilorus>

POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH THE DEMOCRATIC FORCES

INDEX VALUE: **1,80**

Relations between the Ukrainian authorities and Belarusian democratic forces remain limited. Despite the existence of regular contacts, they take place mainly at the middle political level of Ukraine: at the level of political advisers, deputies of the Parliament, and the Ambassador-at-Large, whose competence includes building relations with the political centers of Belarus. Meetings of representatives of the Belarusian opposition with Ukrainian official structures at a higher level, such as, for example, an official meeting between Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, remained unrealized. No official formats of regular interaction between the democratic forces and official Kyiv, on the model of the EU Consultative Group, the Consultative Group of the Council of Europe, the Strategic Dialogue of Belarusian democratic forces with the USA, have been established. The interaction takes place in the formats of joint conferences, expert forums, and ad hoc meetings.

Since the beginning of 2024, there is a positive shift in the rhetoric of the Ukrainian side in relation to the Belarusian democratic forces. If after the events in Belarus in 2020 there sounded mainly criticism connected with the inability of democratic forces to achieve changes in Belarus, as Ukrainians did during the Maidan, now the tone has softened, and the Ukrainian side has become more open for dialog.

Experts note that with the appointment of Ihor Kyzym, de facto special representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine for Belarus, the relations with the democratic forces of Belarus improved. His openness to interaction with a wide range of Belarusian democratic forces ("from Zianon Pazniak to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya"), his aspiration to develop Ukraine's strategy on Belarus, his competence in Belarusian issues, and simply the emergence of him as an authorized contact person, gave a certain structuredness to the interaction with Belarusian democratic forces.

However, despite the existence of contacts, the Ukrainian side remains cautious about raising the level of relations. This is connected with the desire to avoid further escalation and participation of Belarus in the war on the side of Russia. Besides, the Ukrainian side has doubts concerning the subjectivity of Belarusian democratic forces — the Ukrainian authorities continue to wonder what exactly these forces can offer to Ukraine. So far, there is a dialog, but it mostly boils down to separated instances of transactional relations, without deeper involvement. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and members of Parliament from the group "For a Democratic Belarus!" maintain contacts with the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus and the Coordination Council, but these relations are still at a developing stage.

2. SECURITY RELATIONS

INDEX VALUE: **1,49**

FORMAL SECURITY RELATIONS

Official interaction between the law enforcement agencies of Ukraine and Belarus in the conditions of the current military aggression is practically absent. Contacts between law enforcers and special services are reduced to a minimum required to ensure the solution of necessary practical issues such as the exchange of prisoners of war, the return of Ukrainian citizens through the territory of Belarus, and the avoidance of military escalation. At the same time, informal ties at the personal level remain possible. In particular, the experts suggested that among the representatives of the older generation of military and security forces, who have common roots in the Soviet training system, such contacts may take place to achieve tactical or personal goals.

The border between Ukraine and Belarus is closed, physical communication has been halted, and border crossings are not functioning (except for one, available for Ukrainian citizens crossing from Belarus into Ukraine). The minimum necessary interaction may take place, at the very least "border guards are in visual contact with each other." Such contacts may be accompanied by "exchanges of messages on billboards", or insults, as was the case with the famous letter from the head of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine. The situation reflects a general hostile atmosphere, but there are no direct aggressive actions against each other.

There is interaction between the parties on the exchange of prisoners of war: in some cases when prisoners of war are exchanged between Ukraine and Russia, they are first transferred to the territory of Belarus ⁴; in June 2024, Ukraine received its prisoners from Belarusian prisons while Belarus did not take Belarusian prisoners who fought on the side of Russia ⁵. This may indicate that Belarus is following Moscow's instructions rather than acting independently in negotiations with Ukraine.

Ukraine does not cooperate with Belarus on matters of law enforcement, crime prevention, or related spheres, largely due to widespread human rights violations and political persecution in Belarus, which Belarusian authorities classify as criminal offenses. At the same time, according to one of the Belarusian experts, "there were no cases of transferring to Russia or Belarus [from Ukraine], in one way or another, of representatives of Belarusian opposition or Belarusian volunteers. But nothing can be ruled out {...}, because Ukraine has a very specific legal system and judicial system, political system, so I would not say that there is no risk and absolutely all guarantees will be observed. There are complex nuances involved." Although there is no precise information on the level of cooperation between the security services of the countries (Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus (KGB), intelligence services and others), experts note the possibility of pragmatic contacts on issues affecting the vital security interests of Ukraine. These contacts may be of a closed nature and take place to prevent direct clashes or to solve specific tasks, but at the official level, cooperation between all security agencies is minimal and rather symbolizes a state of pre-war tension.

⁴ <https://reform.news/115-rossijskih-voennyh-nahodjatsja-v-belarusi-posle-obmena-voennoplennymi-s-ukrainoj>

⁵ <https://reform.news/115-rossijskih-voennyh-nahodjatsja-v-belarusi-posle-obmena-voennoplennymi-s-ukrainoj>

RELATIONS WITH DEMOCRATIC FORCES

The interaction between the official structures of Ukraine and Belarusian democratic forces in the field of security remains limited. According to Ukrainian experts, the main problem is that the Belarusian democratic forces have neither their own military resources nor a significant human resource, which makes their subjectivity in security issues extremely weak. For Ukraine, however, strengthening its own security and defense capabilities is the highest priority. Any projects connected to the topic of independent Belarusian forces can currently be realized only under the patronage of Ukraine and with its approval. Some projects, such as the Kastuś Kalinoŭski Regiment or a Belarusian company within the 79th Assault Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, do exist, but they can hardly be called large-scale. In particular, according to some Ukrainian experts, Belarusian formations are more poorly armed than Russian formations within the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and the activities of the Russian Volunteer Corps (RDK) are much more intensively covered by the Ukrainian media:

"...(if) we compare, for instance, the level of armament of the RDK or other Russian formations and the level of presence of Russian volunteer formations in the information space with that of Belarusian formations and the level of armament of Belarusian formations, then (...) it gives the impression that for Ukraine's military-political leadership, Belarusian volunteer units practically do not exist."

Belarusian experts look at the situation somewhat more optimistically and note that Belarusian volunteers fighters on the side of Ukraine are themselves an important element of Belarus-Ukraine interaction. Ukraine provides opportunities for the formation of Belarusian military units, which potentially creates "the basis and infrastructure for the revival of the Belarusian army." The Belarusian military formation Kastuś Kalinoŭski Regiment, operating within the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), interacts with Ukrainian intelligence services, including the Main Directorate of Intelligence of Ukraine (DIU or GUR) and the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). There is cooperation between a group of Belarusian "Cyberpartisans" and the special services of Ukraine on verification of Belarusian citizens to prevent Russian agents from infiltrating the territory of Ukraine. There is also possible cooperation between some Belarusian structures (in particular, BYPOL) and special services of Ukraine in organizing guerrilla actions (such as blowing up a Russian plane at the base in Machulishchy near Minsk).

Belarusian volunteers, such as the Kalinoŭski Regiment and other units, are formally integrated into the AFU, but have a number of limitations. One of the key difficulties was the lack of legalization and the difficulty of obtaining Ukrainian citizenship, which made it problematic for them to stay in Ukraine after completing their contract. Currently, thanks to the adoption of a law by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the process of obtaining citizenship for foreign volunteers, including Belarusians and their family members, will be simplified. However, additional challenges persist, including difficulties in obtaining combatant status — which grants social benefits — limited access to banking services, restricted promotion opportunities beyond the rank of sergeant, and limited chances to engage in volunteer activities, among others. Currently (October 2024), a draft law allowing foreigners and stateless persons to obtain officer ranks in the Armed Forces of Ukraine is under consideration in the Verkhovna Rada, which may help to remove some restrictions.

On an official level, there has been no breakthrough in Ukraine's interactions with Belarusian democratic structures, such as the United Transitional Cabinet, although contacts and meetings with its representatives on security matters remain relatively regular.

Thus, Ukraine's cooperation with the Belarusian democratic forces in the field of security is not large-scale and does not reach the level of meaningful official interaction at the state level.

3. ECONOMIC INTERACTION

INDEX VALUE: **1,64**

Interviewer: : *What is special to note about the current economic relations?*

Expert: *The fact that they are actually dead.*

Ukraine's economic ties with Belarus have been reduced to a historical minimum after 2022. While in 2021 the trade turnover between the countries amounted to almost 7 billion dollars, by 2023 it has dropped by more than 99% to 23.3 million dollars. The numbers are expected to be even lower in 2024, indicating a further deterioration in economic relations. Nevertheless, some sort of relationship exists, and it is not completely broken: "Just yesterday, the Hungarians talked about some agreement to continue the transit of gas and oil products through Belarus and Ukraine. This means that some kind of communication, possibly through the partner countries or on neutral platforms, is going on."

Belarusian citizens in Ukraine and Ukrainian citizens in Belarus can do business, but are bound to face number of obstacles and restrictions. At the beginning of the war, the assets of Belarusian companies in Ukraine were frozen or seized, and some of them were subsequently sold at auctions. Belarusian citizens in Ukraine face legalization challenges that impact business activities, including difficulties in opening bank accounts, using credit cards, and other related issues. For Ukrainian citizens of Belarusian origin, no additional issues have arisen in conducting business in Ukraine: "In other words, there is no persecution based on nationality."

In Belarus, the situation is less dramatic, and Ukrainians can open and do business on the same basis as other foreign nationals, although, according to some experts, they "had a very bad time" at the beginning of the war.

Given the previous volume of business contacts, even today "businesses try to find ways to cooperate and operate in this or other way." Due to the complexity of the situation, such interactions often take place through intermediary firms, third countries or "gray schemes". In particular, products from the occupied territories are brought to Belarus, and some Belarusian products get to Ukraine through third countries.

4. MEDIA

INDEX VALUE: **1,55**

In the media space, relations are asymmetrical. Ukrainian media showed heightened interest in Belarusian topics, particularly in early 2022, when the focus was on Belarus's potential actions in a full-scale war. Later the interest to Belarus decreased, but Belarus remains present in the media space of Ukraine. Periods of heightened attention typically align with news or statements indicating a worsening military situation involving Belarus: "In Ukraine, the Belarusian topic is usually raised during any aggravations: shelling, drone overflights, or Lukashenka's statements. In a positive agenda, this issue is touched upon by some experts, such as Yevhen Mahda, with his well-known concept of "1000 steps towards each other". But I would not say that there are a lot of such experts. Mostly negative connotations towards official Belarus, Lukashenka and the Belarusian people in particular prevail in the media field."

Belarusian experts and democratic politicians regularly participate in live broadcasts and are actively represented on Ukrainian television. Ukrainian commentators are mostly present in Belarusian non-state media and independent channels such as Euroradio. Ukrainian experts are rarely seen in Belarusian state media.

Interestingly, until 2023, Belarusian speakers had the opportunity to speak in the Ukrainian media in the Belarusian language. "Now the law on quotas on Ukrainian media has been introduced, and in fact it looks like this: a Belarusian speaker speaks either in Russian or English, and he is translated into Ukrainian."

In Belarusian independent media Ukraine is regarded as a natural ally in the struggle against the common enemy, and this is reflected in the support and sympathy to Ukraine. At the same time, Russian propaganda narratives and negative connotations towards Ukraine, its authorities and people significantly prevail in the state media of Belarus. In the Ukrainian media space, according to Ukrainian experts, hate speech is practically not used in relation to Belarus, except for negative comments about Lukashenka and his regime. Some Belarusian experts note that hate speech can also appear on the pages of the Ukrainian media in relation to Belarusians in general.

In Belarusian state media, hate speech is present in the context of negative portrayal of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, as well as their alleged responsibility for the war. "If we talk about Belarusian state media, it is dominated by Russian propaganda narratives, which have almost completely taken over the space. Only occasionally there are more neutral statements about living together with Ukrainians and all that. And, strangely enough, such statements often come directly from Lukashenka himself, more often than from his aides."

5. CULTURE, EDUCATION, SOCIETY

INDEX VALUE: **1,48**

Cultural relations between Ukraine and Belarus have become much more complicated recently. Earlier, until the beginning of 2022, books were actively translated from Belarusian into Ukrainian, and these books could be found in Ukrainian bookstores. However, since the beginning of 2022, such cases have become extremely rare. There are some cultural events and performances, but they tend to have a local character and are usually oriented to a narrow circle of people familiar with the realities of Belarus or having Belarusian connections. This makes such events less accessible to the general public. The absence of notable cultural figures like Siarhej Mikhalok, who was famous in Ukraine and became a symbol of the Revolution of Dignity, is also felt. Experts note that "there is a lack of fresh ideas, fresh impetus" for the development of cultural relations.

In Ukraine, there are serious discussions about the necessity to exclude not only Russian, but also Belarusian culture from the public sphere. This argument often comes from the same people who supported Belarusian cultural figures just three years before. Although some artists continue to engage with the Belarusian context, their support remains somewhat marginal. Few Ukrainian cultural figures are ready to speak positively about Belarus — rather expressing a neutral or negative position. The situation in the education sector is equally complex. In 2022, the agreement for mutual recognition of higher education degrees was terminated. Previously, Belarusian studies programs were available in Ukrainian universities, but these have been sharply reduced since 2022. The Kyiv National University has partially resumed courses in Belarusian studies, but in general, the situation remains difficult. For example, Belarusian researchers face difficulties in accessing Ukrainian archives, as there are no relevant regulations in place, and appeals to the management of these institutions do not yield results. On the other hand, there are educational programs offered for Belarusian volunteer combatants at Ukrainian universities and the first group of students will be enrolled under a preferential program in the 2024-2025 academic year.

In Belarus, courses on the history and culture of Ukraine are taught within the framework of two courses on the history of Russia and Ukraine (BSU Faculty of History, Department of Russian History). There is no separate course or special course on the history of Ukraine. There is a contradictory situation in the field of memory politics. On the one hand, the names of streets and memorable places connected with Belarus were renamed in Ukraine. On the other hand, the name of Kastuś Kalinoŭski became known thanks to the Kastuś Kalinoŭski Regiment, and streets in cities were renamed in honor of Kalinoŭski and fallen Belarusians, i.e. despite the complicated relations, a certain memory and recognition remain.

The relations between Belarusian and Ukrainian societies have noticeably changed after 2022. If earlier the attitude to Belarusians was positive, now, according to some sociological studies, about 50% of Ukrainians have a negative attitude to Belarusians, and only a little more than 30% express a positive attitude. However, experts note that a more detailed analysis reveals "a stronger negative attitude toward the

state rather than toward the people" in both societies, with 87% of Ukrainians, for example, expressing a negative view of the Belarusian state. A more detailed research also shows a more favorable attitude toward Belarusians living in Ukraine, suggesting a generally positive perception upon closer analysis. Negative attitude to Belarusians sometimes shows at the everyday level:

"There are cases of refusal to serve Belarusians at notaries, lawyers, migration service. It is difficult to apply for refugee status. In the frontline zone the attitude is much better."

"Four times I was taken off the train. Interrogations. Polite as they may be. In general, it was a big problem in 2022. They deprived people of residence permits. Now this problem is not so acute."

Among Belarusians, there is a similar trend: half of them (54% as of December 2023)⁶ have a positive attitude towards Ukrainians. The experts emphasize that Belarusians also "have a more negative attitude to the state than to the people", while the memory of moments of joint cooperation, interaction, border cooperation, some interpersonal ties, family, friendly, working ones "plays a role in the preservation of positive attitudes to the Ukrainian society."

Experts note that mutual stereotyping, very little knowledge of societies about each other and the influence of Russian propaganda distort the peoples' perception of each other.

"For example, there are accusations that Belarusians did not protest in 2022, when Belarus became complicit in the Russian invasion. These narratives, which largely do not reflect the reality in Belarus, reveal a lack of sustained dialog between us—one that would foster a better understanding of each country's situation. However, Belarusians are probably treated with more understanding now than in the beginning of 2022, because a lot of time has passed since the attacks from Belarusian territory. And that is why this attitude has become more neutral."

"...it seems to me that Ukrainians had more stereotypes about Belarusians than Belarusians about Ukrainians. This is a somewhat characteristic of "smaller nations". We (Belarusians) followed very closely what was happening on the Maidan, what was happening in the first years of the war in Donbas, though the Ukrainian side was not so much aware of what was happening in our country in 2020. It's an interesting trend, I don't know. I don't claim to be academic, but I think it works that way. And many Ukrainian public figures, in general, Ukrainian society thinks that Belarusians betrayed Ukrainians, that they are not such good brothers and neighbors and everything else."

"...the situation in Belarusian society is complicated, because a part of society, which supports Lukashenka and Russia, thinks that Ukrainians have sold out to the West. And there is a gradation of such an opinion: on the one hand, a part of society thinks that only the elite has sold out, while the other part thinks that the whole country has sold out."

Among the democratically minded Belarusians in 2022 there has been a significant

⁶ Attitudes of Belarusians toward the war and foreign policy. Results of a public opinion survey conducted from November 8 to 14, 2023. Chatham House, Chatham House, <https://belaruspolls.org/wave-17>

growth of support for Ukraine. However, the growth of negative attitudes towards all Belarusians, both those supporting Lukashenka and "independent Belarusians", led to the "cooling" of the attitude of the democratic part of the Belarusian society towards Ukraine. "This is immediately visible by the volume of donations, by the volume of support, by the level of public discussion that concerns Ukrainian issues. So here, unfortunately, I see such a negative tendency, although recently it equalizes, both on the part of Ukrainians and Belarusians."

Some experts emphasize that we need to work with the civil society of Ukraine, demonstrating that it is impossible to put an "equal sign" between Belarusians in general and the regime. The example with the Belarusian volunteer combatants, to whom the Ukrainian society has a positive attitude, can create positive dynamics in other areas of cooperation as well.

Because of the war, the number of inter-human contacts has dramatically decreased. All control and border points, except for the humanitarian channel for the return of Ukrainians at Damanava village, are closed. Crossing the border is possible only through Poland. In 2022, Belarus did not close the border for Ukrainians coming from temporarily occupied territories: "This did not mean that Ukrainians could go there. It meant that somewhere on the neutral territory between Belarus and Ukraine there was a minimal commodity exchange, there was an opportunity to deliver medicines and food." However, such interactions were sporadic and quickly stopped. "The border cooperation that existed earlier, when Ukrainians and Belarusians could freely visit each other, is no longer in force. The tourist sphere has also disappeared: before the full-scale invasion began, several buses with Belarusian tourists used to come to Lviv every day, walking, staying here, going on excursions. Now it is impossible. Belarusians cannot go to the sea in Ukraine, Ukrainians cannot visit Minsk or other Belarusian cities. The war has created a crack between families."

6. TOTAL INDEX VALUES

	INDEX VALUE
Political relations	1.53
Security relationship	1.49
Economic relations	1.64
Media	1.55
Society, culture, education	1.48
Total index value:	1.55

Table 1. Total index value and values by relationship groups

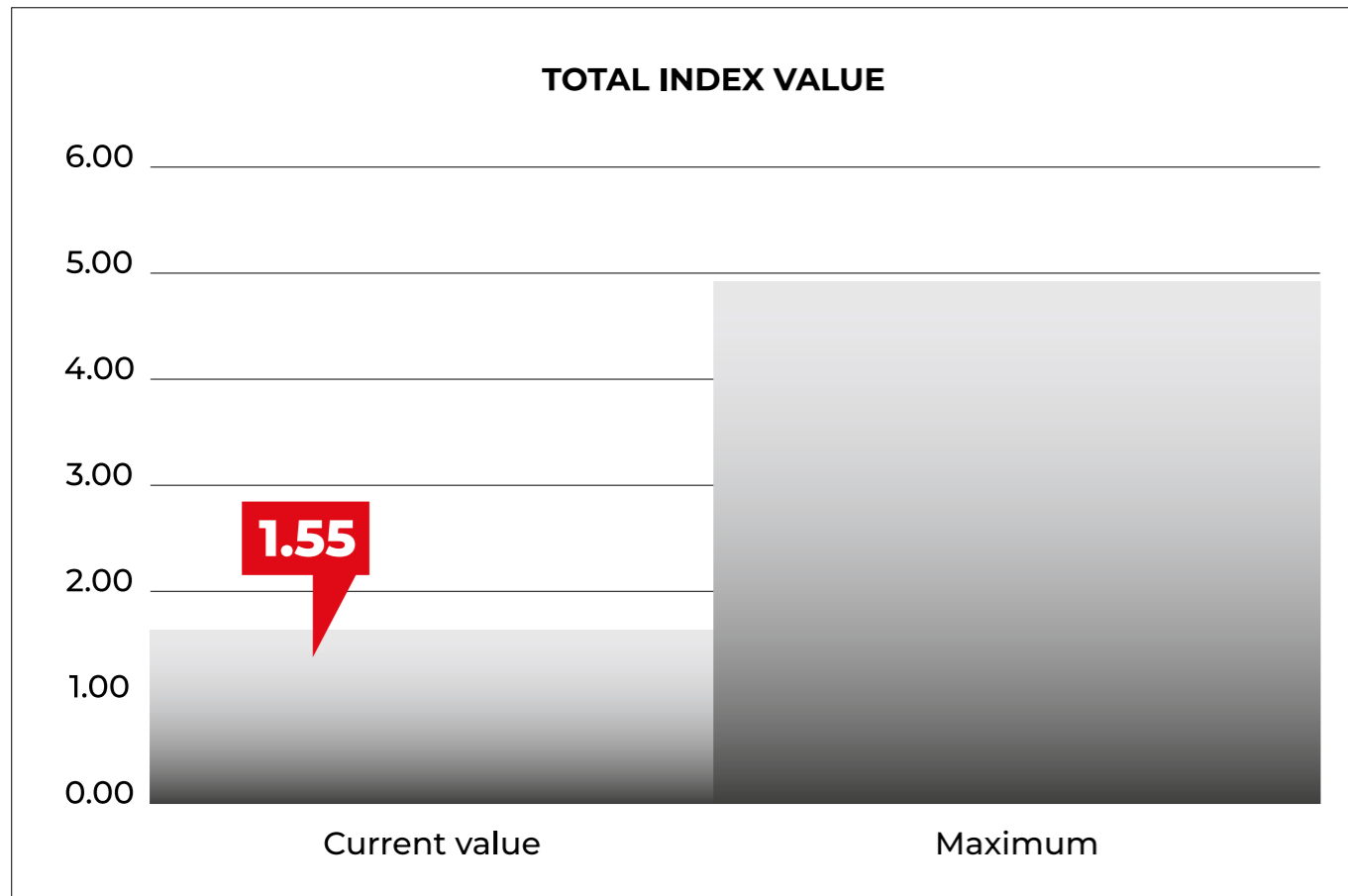


Figure 1. Index value

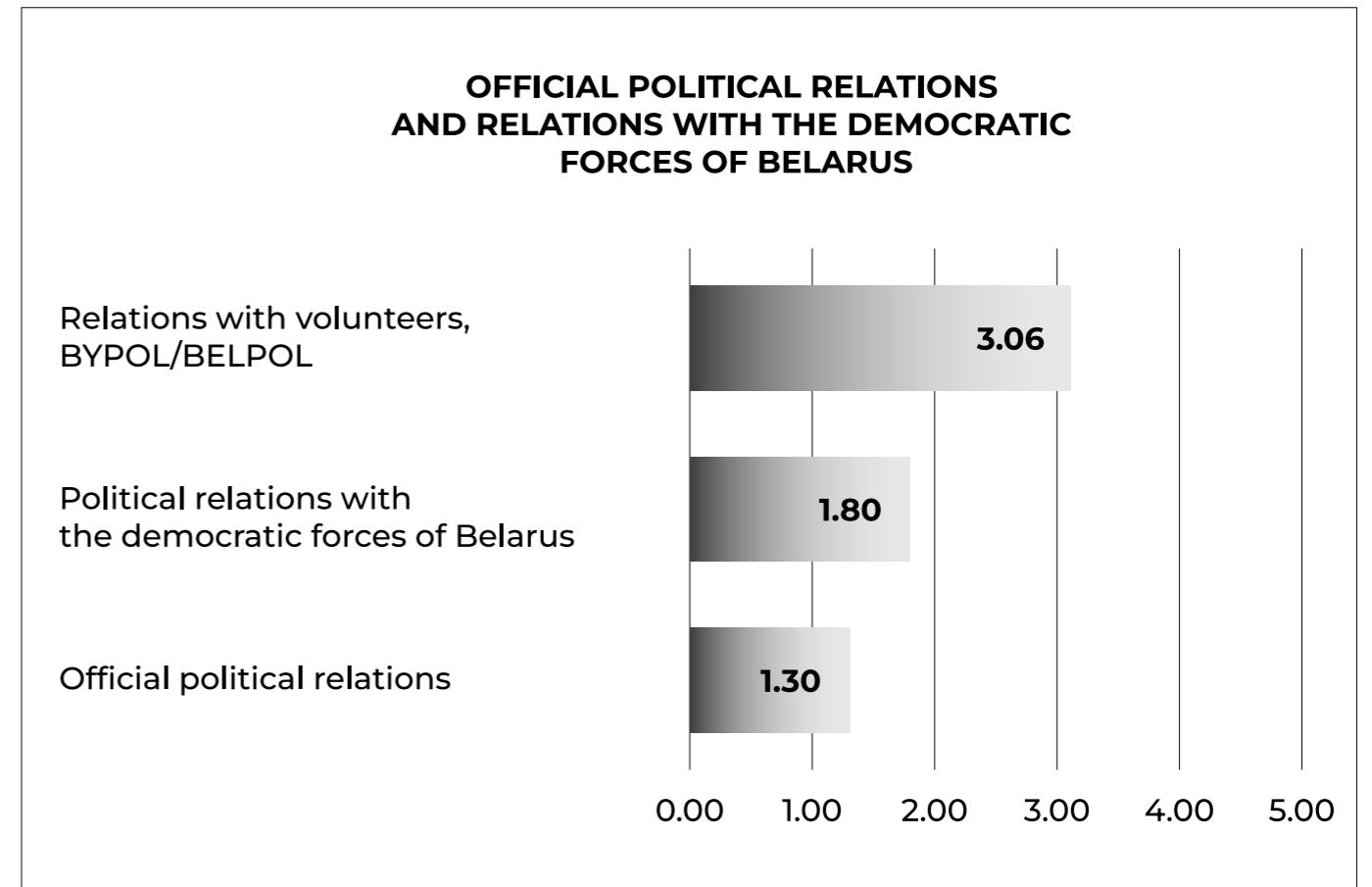


Figure 3. Official political relations and relations with democratic forces in Belarus

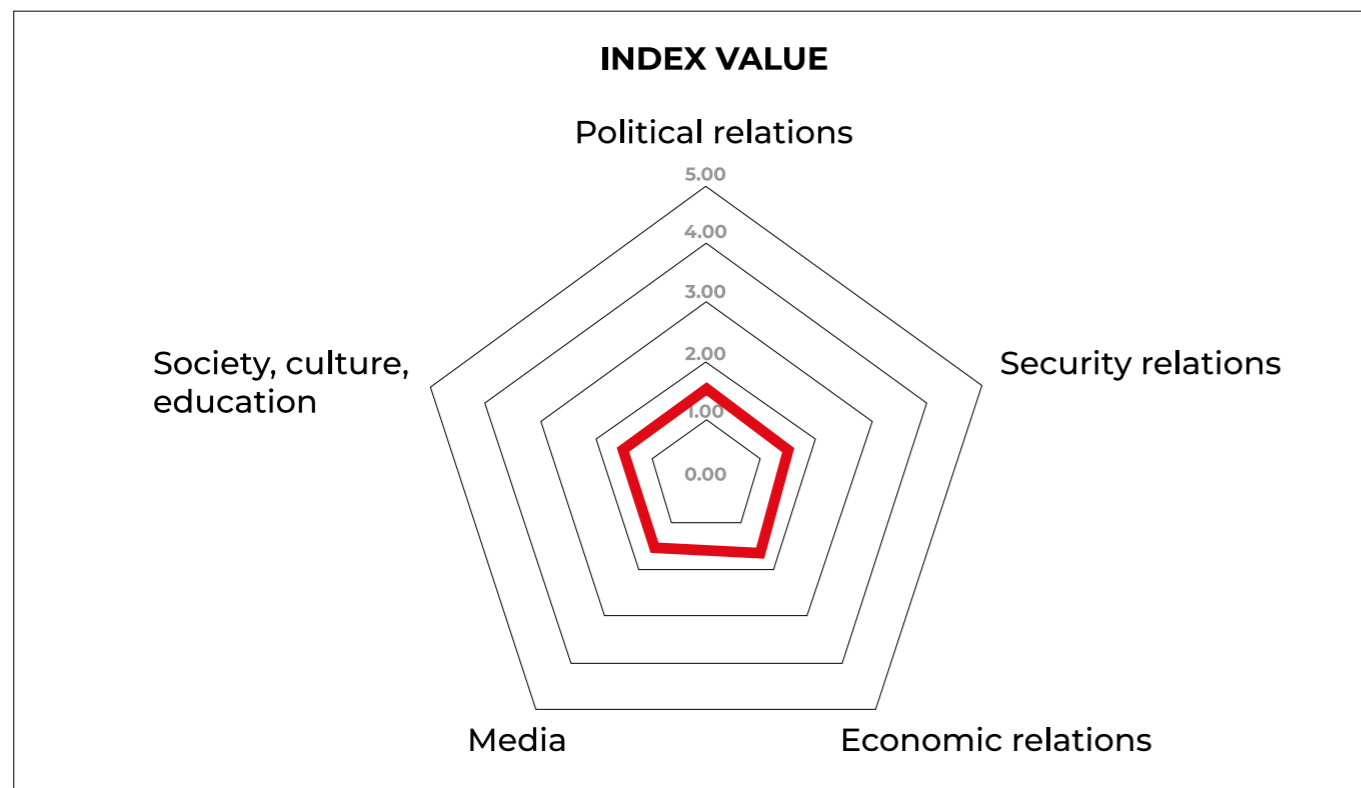


Figure 2. Index values by attitude groups

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The index data allow us to draw a number of conclusions:

1. By 2024, the relations between Belarus and Ukraine had shrunk to a critical minimum in all areas of interaction. In many cases, experts stated the absence of any relations at all, especially at the official level.
2. The main factor that leads to this state of affairs is the war and Belarus's complicity in the Russian aggression. Accordingly, the end of hostilities can become a starting point for the restoration of Belarusian-Ukrainian relations.
3. The war has negatively affected the mutual perception of the two nations. Ukrainians often perceive Belarusians through the prism of the policy of Lukashenka's regime, connected with the support of Russia, which causes discontent, disappointment, and sometimes understandable hatred towards the co-aggressor. On the other hand, in the Belarusian society, a part of the population that supports Lukashenka and Russia perceives Ukrainians as "sold out to the West," which also contributes to tension.

4. Belarusian society is not homogeneous in its attitude to Ukraine. On the one hand, there are democratically minded Belarusians who support Ukraine, and on the other hand, there are pro-Russian Belarusians who are hostile to Ukrainians. This internal division creates a difficulty in establishing a sustainable dialog between the societies.

5. An important condition for improving relations between Ukrainian and Belarusian societies is the end of the war and the preservation of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Despite the stereotypes and propaganda, there is a possibility that with the end of the war, relations may improve, especially if expert dialog, dialog at the level of civil society, contacts in the field of culture and education, and interpersonal interaction continue.

6. Ukrainian and Belarusian societies need a deeper dialog and mutual understanding. Belarusians need support in separating their people from Lukashenko's regime.

7. Ukraine's political interaction with the democratic forces of Belarus is somewhat better than the interaction with the official Belarusian authorities. However, this interaction is also very limited. The most positive level of relations is formed with Belarusian volunteer combatant formations fighting on the side of Ukraine.

8. One of the ways to restore bilateral relations could be by sharing Ukraine's experience in local self-governance, decommunization, and fostering common narratives within the Baltic-Black Sea region.

9. Lukashenka's potential departure from power can also be called an objective condition for the warming of relations between the two countries. This hypothetical event may give an impetus to the bilateral dialog due to the change of the actor.

10. A broadly shared understanding that Belarus is following its own path can be considered a largely positive factor. While Belarus is unlikely to take the Ukrainian path today or in the future, it also won't voluntarily become part of Russia. However, acknowledging and applying Ukraine's post-Soviet experience for development and reform in Belarus could enhance bilateral trust and broaden meaningful areas of cooperation.

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