Belarus–Ukraine Relations Index

Research Report

2026

Belarus–Ukraine Relations Index

Research Report 2026

FREE BELARUS CENTER

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG

Contents

Introduction.....5

Methodology.....7

1. Political relations

1.1 Official Political Relations.....10

1.2 Ukraine's interaction with Belarusian democratic forces.....12

1.3 Prospects and factors affecting the dynamics of political relations.....13

2. Economic relations.....15

2.1 Overall Nature of Economic Ties and Trade Dynamics.....15

2.2 Sectors of Retained or "Grey" Interaction.....16

2.3 Investment and Infrastructure Ties.....16

2.4 Business Opportunities for Citizens of Both Countries.....17

3. Security Relations.....18

3.1 Overall Nature of Security Relations and Assessment of Military Tension.....18

3.2 Contacts Between Security Structures and Intelligence Services.....19

3.3 Relations with the Belarusian Volunteer Movement and Challenges of Interaction.....20

4. Cultural and educational relations.....22

4.1 Overall State of Cultural and Educational Ties.....22

4.2 Examples of Current Interaction in the Sphere of Culture and Education.....23

5. Relations Between Societies.....25

5.1 Overall State of Relations Between Societies.....25

5.2 The Image of the Other Country in the Media Space, Propaganda, and Hate Speech.....26

5.3 People-to-People Contacts and Cross-Border Interaction.....27

6. Overall Index Value.....28

7. Prospects for the development of relations.....30

Appendix. Reference data on specific parameters.....32

Organisers and Authors of the Study.....34

Introduction

The Index of Belarus–Ukraine Relations is being published for the third time. Its concept is fairly simple: year after year, it measures what traditional analytical tools often fail to capture.

Bilateral trade turnover between Belarus and Ukraine has fallen to levels that, in peacetime, would be rounded down to zero. The Embassy of Belarus in Kyiv stands closed, while the Embassy of Ukraine in Minsk operates almost exclusively on consular affairs. Government-to-government dialogue has ceased, parliamentary cooperation does not exist, and the heads of state exchange remarks solely through the press. Judging by standard indicators, there is nothing to describe.

Though the relations have not disappeared. Instead, they have shifted from official state channels to confidential tracks, from the intergovernmental sphere to the domain of civil society and personal contacts. Moreover, Kyiv is also building part of this relationship not with official Minsk, but with Belarusian democratic forces. Our task is to capture this movement and show it over time: not merely to answer whether the relationship is good or bad, but to record the direction in which it is moving and the speed of that movement, as well as to define today their underlying core.

That is why we have measured not bilateral ties in the conventional sense, but rather relations within a triangle: Ukraine – official Minsk – Belarusian democratic forces.

We break down ongoing developments into five key areas: politics, economics, security, culture and education, and relations between societies. Within each area we ask experts from both countries to assess the current state of relations and their dynamics according to five specific parameters.

This framework makes it possible to consider together developments that would otherwise be scattered across separate narratives: an embassy building overgrown with grass alongside a functioning channel for exchanging prisoners of war; or exports reduced to zero alongside a book by a Belarusian author translated into Ukrainian language for the first time in five years.

A comparison with the previous edition of the Index shows a period that, at first glance, appears stagnant. The overall Index value, as in 2025, remains at the absolute minimum level of relations – 1.0, with a slight overall trend toward deterioration (–0.08) among expert evaluations. Economic relations remained at 1.0, same as security relations, and relations between societies held steady at 2.0.

However, contradictory shifts are taking place beneath the surface of this general stagnation. Political relations increased from 1.0 to 2.0 – for the first time throughout the observation period. This rise was driven by the interaction between Ukraine and Belarusian democratic forces.

This was the only political indicator to rise from 2.0 to 3.0 points, and it also demonstrated the strongest positive shift in expert optimism across the three editions of the Index (+0.76). All other indicators in this group, by contrast, declined: while official relations between Kyiv and Minsk remained at 1.0, expert assessments of the dynamics of change showed a noticeable negative drop (–0.31).

The second movement is less visible, but no less important. Relations in the field of culture and education dropped from 2.0 to 1.0 – the only group to lose a full point. A year ago we noted a cautious improvement in this domain and hoped that horizontal ties would serve as a resilient channel surviving the freeze in official relations. But that did not happen unfortunately.

Taken together, the picture is as follows: only 5 out of 25 measured parameters shifted noticeably upwards, all of them concerning Kyiv's relations with Belarusian democratic forces and the Belarusian (military) volunteer movement. All other parameters remained stagnant or declined. So this year's Index is not about improvement or deterioration, but about redistribution: the limited elements of Belarus–Ukraine relations that remain capable of growth are now growing in only one direction.

In the final section of this report we present expert forecasts regarding the possible prospects for the development of bilateral relations. The Index, however, is not a forecast, and we do not recommend reading it as one. How the current phase will culminate depends on circumstances that lie far beyond bilateral relations: the course of the Russia–Ukraine war and how this war is brought to an end, negotiations between Washington and Minsk, the extent to which Alexander Lukashenka depends on the Kremlin, and internal politics in Ukraine itself. We offer instead a precise baseline – the opportunity to observe the exact condition in which all parties will arrive at the moment when these circumstances change.

Methodology

The object of measurement of the Belarus–Ukraine Relations Index is the state of relations between the two countries. The Index evaluates the actual state of relations within the triangle "Kyiv – Minsk – Belarusian democratic forces", as well as the dynamics of their positive or negative changes.

The entire set of mutual relations between the two countries is divided into five main thematic areas: political relations, economic relations, security relations, relations in the field of culture and education, and relations between societies. Each thematic area of relations consists of five parameters subject to expert evaluation:

1. Political relations:

- Relations between the heads of state, governments, and parliaments.
- Relations between official state institutions of Ukraine and Belarusian democratic forces.
- Nature of official diplomatic relations.
- Current state of the treaty and legal framework between the states.
- Existence of mechanisms for synchronization and borrowing legislative norms.

2. Economic relations:

- State of mutual trade between the countries – characteristics of exports, imports, and the trade balance.
- State of mutual investments – presence of joint investment projects at the state level or by private businesses.
- Presence of shared infrastructure projects in transport, communications, energy, environment, and the development of cross-border cooperation, including multilateral projects.
- Possibility of conducting business by citizens of Ukraine in Belarus, and vice versa.
- State of the treaty and legal framework in the field of economic relations, including free trade agreements, agreements on avoidance of double taxation, pension provision agreements, etc.

3. Relations in the field of security:

- Relations between the defence and security ministries and agencies of Ukraine and Belarus: Ministry of Defence, General Prosecutor's Office, Ministry of Internal Affairs, internal security services, foreign intelligence services.
- Presence of military confrontation or the conduct of joint military exercises; as well as the existence of a practice of bilateral inspections of military activity by Ukraine and the Republic of Belarus.
- Joint projects in the defence-industrial sector.
- Trends in the development of the treaty framework and practices of cooperation in the field of security (combating international crime, illegal migration, extradition of criminals from Belarus to Ukraine and vice versa, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, military-strategic cooperation, common security concepts, harmonization of both countries' legislation concerning war crimes, border and cross-border cooperation).
- Contacts between Ukraine's defence and security ministries and agencies and the structures of Belarusian democratic forces, including Belarusian (military) volunteers in Ukraine, BYPOL/BelPol, cyber-partisans, and others

4. Relations in the field of culture and education:

- The overall representation of Belarusian culture in Ukraine and vice versa, including the existence of cultural exchanges, touring activities, and interaction between state and civil-society cultural institutions.
- Activity in translating literature into Belarusian/Ukrainian languages.
- Academic studies of Belarusian history, culture, politics, and language at Ukrainian universities, and conversely the study of Ukrainian history, culture, and politics, as well as the Ukrainian language at Belarusian universities.
- Mutual recognition of diplomas across educational levels.
- The education of Belarusian students in Ukraine and vice versa.

5. Relations between societies:

- State of interpersonal contacts (visa regime, land and air connections, and cross-border and cross-border movement).
- Relations between the Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples mirrored in sociological polling.
- Nature of interaction in the information sphere (the practice of media content purchases, TV broadcasting by Belarusian and Ukrainian channels, the operation of the BELTA and Ukrinform news-agencies websites in Ukrainian and Belarusian languages; and the Ukrainian audience of Belarusian broadcasters and vice versa.
- Presence of "hate speech" in public media of Belarus and Ukraine.
- Alignment on national and historical memory policies.

The Index pays dedicated attention to assessing relations not only between official Kyiv and Minsk, but also between Kyiv and the Belarusian democratic forces.

The assessment of the state of relations is based on a combination of expert questionnaire surveys, a series of semi-structured interviews, and on a collection of factual and statistical information on the state of relations.

The expert questionnaire survey is conducted among three groups of respondents:

- Experts and academic researchers ("experts" group).
- Representatives of political structures, official state institutions, and thematic civil-society organizations. This group may include current or former politicians and government officials, as well as public figures ("politics and civil society" group).
- Media representatives, editors, and analytical journalists ("media" group).

Each respondent group includes representatives from both Belarus and Ukraine. A total of 31 respondents took part in completing the questionnaire. In the questionnaire expert respondents are asked to answer 30 thematic questions on cooperation, addressing both the intergovernmental level and issues of practical interest to citizens of both countries. Survey respondents evaluate the level of relations for each parameter on a scale from 1 (lowest level of relations) to 5 (highest level of relations).

To assess the dynamics of relations, survey respondents also evaluate the extent to which the state of relations has changed across each parameter (improved, deteriorated, or remained unchanged). The quantitative assessment of the dynamics of change is calculated as the difference between negative and positive evaluations divided by the total number of expert assessments. This, therefore, captures the "temperature" of expert opinion.

Dynamic assessments from 0 to 0.30 indicate slight changes, assessments from 0.31 to 0.50 indicate noticeable changes, and assessments of 0.50 or above indicate major changes.

To determine the overall quantitative value of the Index, the median value across all evaluations (Index value) is calculated, as well as the median

value for each of the 5 thematic groups (group relations value). To eliminate extreme outliers during the Index calculation, winsorization is applied to exclude extreme assessments: all values below the 5th percentile are replaced with the value of the 5th percentile, while all values above the 95th percentile are replaced with the value of the 95th percentile.

In addition to the survey, semi-structured expert interviews are conducted to obtain in-depth characteristics of the state of relations. These semi-structured interviews are carried out with experienced Ukrainian and Belarusian experts or practitioners engaged in one of the thematic relation groups. In this edition of the Index, 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted.

1. Political relations

Index value: 2.0

Expert assessment of dynamics: slight improvement

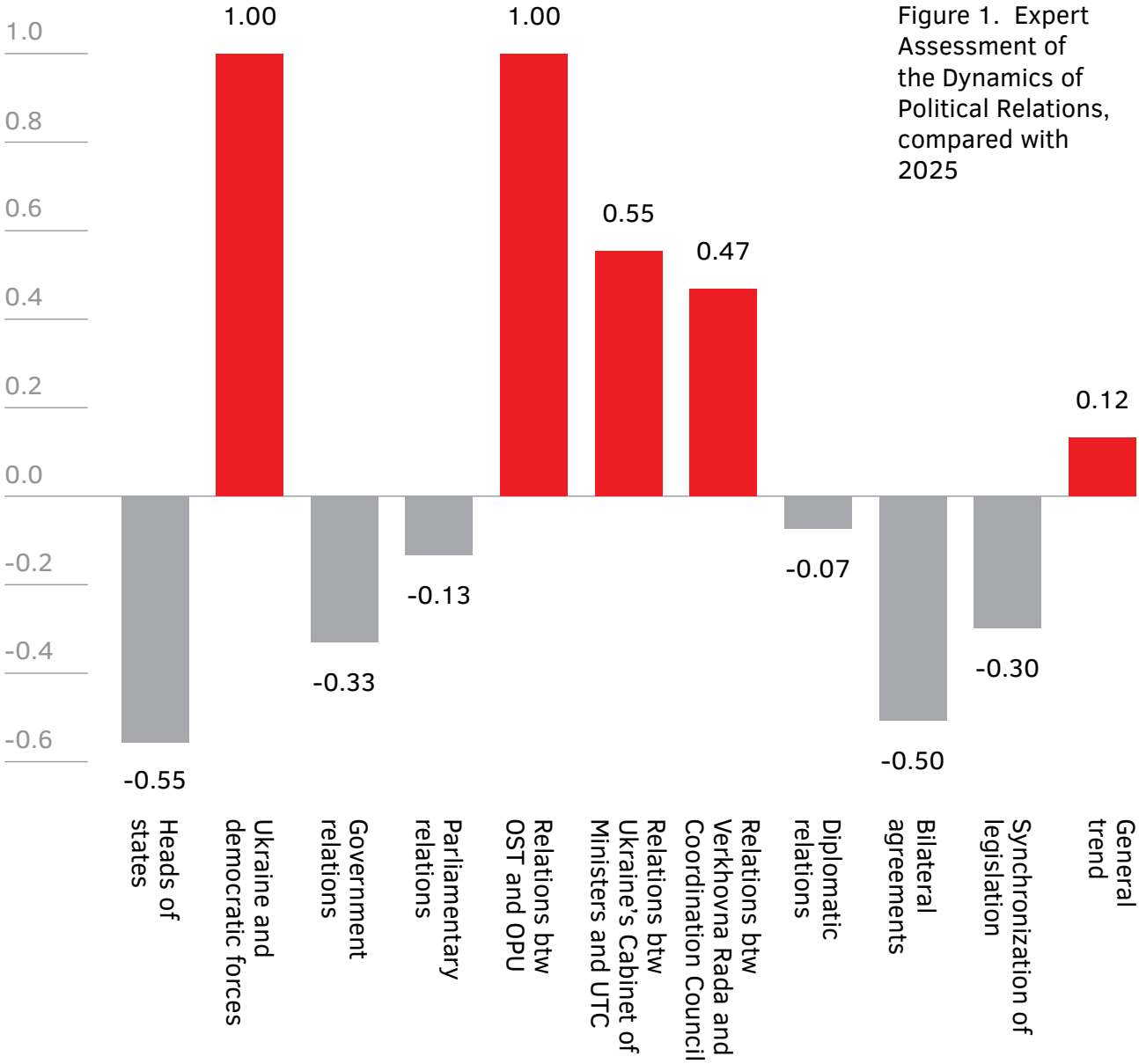


Figure 1. Expert Assessment of the Dynamics of Political Relations, compared with 2025

1.1 Official Political Relations.

Index Value: 1.
Dynamics: Noticeable Deterioration

Expert assessments converge on the fact that Belarusian-Ukrainian political relations are at a very low, effectively minimal level. Following the beginning of full-scale Russian aggression and the use of Belarusian territory for military operations against Ukraine, relations shifted from a complex yet generally pragmatic and fairly intensive state into a regime of actual confrontation and freeze. Several experts characterize them as "tending toward zero", "critically low", or bordering on further escalation. At the same time, communication has not ceased completely: certain technical, consular, humanitarian and, according to expert assessments, informal contacts between state institutions remain in place.

The primary factor determining the state of relations remains Belarus' involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine. Defining this

dynamic is the Ukrainian side's perception of Belarus as a country whose territory, infrastructure, and resources may be used by Russia for the war. In particular, experts point to the continued supply of Belarusian products and components to the Russian military-industrial complex, as well as the threats associated with the deployment of Russian military infrastructure in Belarus. So, bilateral relations are effectively subordinated to the broader logic of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

An additional factor contributing to the deterioration of relations in 2026 was the situation involving mobile network repeaters used to facilitate Russian drone attacks in northern Ukraine. Several experts regard this particular episode as the most notable manifestation of a new stage of confrontation. Ukrainian demands to cease the use of the relevant infrastructure were followed by stern public warnings that Ukraine might strike targets in Belarus. The repeaters ceased operating after that. This episode is regarded not as an isolated incident in expert assessments, but as a part of a broader trend: Kyiv's shift from a policy of cautious containment of Belarus to a tougher and more proactive stance toward Minsk.

Some experts believe that the Belarusian authorities seek to prevent further deterioration in relations with Ukraine and demonstrate a certain readiness for limited de-escalation. Lukashenka simultaneously continues close cooperation with Russia while attempting to maintain room for maneuver, including contacts with other external actors. However, Minsk's dependence on Moscow significantly limits its ability to respond to Kyiv's demands. This creates a contradiction: further escalation in relations with Ukraine is undesirable for Belarus, yet its capacity to independently influence the factors driving this escalation remains limited.

According to most experts, the current state of relations can be defined as a managed conflict situation on the edge of direct confrontation, with minimal communication channels still in place.

This state is far from normal bilateral relations, yet a complete breakdown of relations has not occurred, and both sides continue to refrain from direct military confrontation. The remaining communication channels are necessary primarily to resolve security-related and humanitarian issues, deal with individual practical situations, as well as to prevent potential escalation.

Relations between Ukraine and Belarus are virtually frozen at the diplomatic level. Experts characterize embassy operations as nonexistent or near zero. At the same time, assessments differ slightly depending on what is specifically defined as diplomatic relations. Some experts speak of an almost complete cessation of diplomatic work, while others emphasize that diplomatic relations formally remain in place and that technical communication channels continue to function. For instance, Ukraine's diplomatic presence in Belarus continues to perform consular and humanitarian functions, while political interaction is virtually absent.

Contacts are predominantly practical in nature. They focus on consular services, documentation, humanitarian matters, the movement of citizens, as well as specific cases related to prisoner-of-war exchanges and the return of Ukrainian citizens. One expert separately highlights the existence of a humanitarian channel that enables Ukrainian citizens from occupied territories to return through Belarus. Thus, even amid an almost complete political freeze, the two states retain a minimal level of functional interaction.

Behind the outward stillness, experts note, informal channels of communication persist. The most stable is the level at the security services, through which humanitarian issues are resolved: prisoner-of-war exchanges on Belarusian territory and the evacuation of a group of Belarusian political prisoners in December 2025.

Foreign ministries may exchange diplomatic notes. A notable example was a note from the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposing simplified entry into Belarus for Ukrainian citizens living in border regions for the purpose of collecting wild mushrooms and berries. Representatives of President Zelensky, possibly led by Davyd Arakhamia, likely visited Minsk in June 2026. The visit was not officially reported. Lukashenka mentioned it in a conversation with the governor of the Moscow Region. At the same time, Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has

placed relations with Belarus under the authority of the Department of Unfriendly Countries (alongside Russia and North Korea) since 2025. As a Belarusian expert notes, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha described this work as being focused primarily on threats rather than bilateral relations.

Political communication between the heads of the two states is also virtually absent. Volodymyr Zelensky and Alexander Lukashenka do not maintain regular official dialogue, and their communication is mostly indirect, through public statements and mutual signals. Expert assessments highlight the Ukrainian side's shift toward tougher rhetoric: while Kyiv previously sought to avoid actions that could provoke Lukashenka, this caution diminished substantially in 2026.

At the same time, official relations have not reached the point of a complete breakdown. This is primarily explained by the need for minimum communication in conditions of a shared border and ongoing war. Even those experts who take the most pessimistic view of relational prospects believe that technical channels will inevitably remain. One Ukrainian expert characterizes them as a mechanism that allows both sides, in the most dangerous situations, to 'communicate and defuse' emerging crises.

1.2 Ukraine's interaction with Belarusian democratic forces.

Index value: 3.
Dynamics: significant improvement (+0,76)

Against the backdrop of deteriorating relations between official Kyiv and Minsk, the most notable positive change has been the significant strengthening of Ukraine's contacts with Belarusian democratic forces. Most experts view the past year as a period of qualitative transformation in these relations – shifting from working-level contacts with the Verkhovna Rada inter-factional group "For Democratic Belarus!", along with sporadic interaction with individual Ukrainian state and military institutions and officials, to direct political engagement at the highest level.

The key event was the official visit of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya to Kyiv on May 25, 2026, and her meeting with Volodymyr Zelensky. Experts regard this contact as a breakthrough, as it elevated the relationship to the political level that had previously been lacking. At the same time, contacts intensified between Ukrainian state bodies and the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the United Transition Cabinet, and the Coordination Council.

Despite this qualitative leap in interaction, cooperation with Belarusian democratic forces has not yet acquired a sustainable, institutionalized form. The appointment in May 2026 of Yaraslau Charnahor, whose portfolio includes relations with Belarusian democratic forces, as Ambassador-at-Large of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, represents an important step in this direction. The position had actually remained vacant for a year following the resignation of Ihor Kizim, Ukraine's previous Ambassador-at-Large for Belarus, in February 2025.

The new dynamics reflect a shift in Kyiv's approach to the Belarusian matter. Expert interviews repeatedly highlight a transition from a cautious policy focused on 'not provoking Lukashenka' to a more proactive stance. Experts identify shifts within Ukrainian government structures, personnel changes in the Office of the President of Ukraine, and the appointment of Kyrylo Budanov as its head as factors contributing to this shift.

Another factor highlighted by Ukrainian experts is the evolution of Belarusian democratic forces' own positions towards Russia, Ukraine, and the war. The clear and consistent orientation of democratic forces towards supporting Ukraine since 2022 has gradually reduced the suspicion previously widespread in Ukrainian society and political circles that the Belarusian opposition might be linked to Russian interests.

Some experts point out that a practical basis for cooperation may lie in the fact that Belarusian democratic structures possess certain capabilities that are of interest to Ukraine. The interviews mention their involvement in drafting sanctions lists, assisting efforts to release political prisoners, including Ukrainian citizens, and transmitting information to the Ukrainian side regarding Belarusian military infrastructure

and the involvement of the Belarusian military-industrial complex in supplying the Russian army. Among specific Belarusian structures, experts note the strengthening of Ukraine's contacts with BelPol, the association of former Belarusian security officers.

At the same time, the prospects of this direction should not be overestimated. One expert draws attention to Kyiv's lack of a clear long-term strategy towards both official Minsk and Belarusian democratic forces. Others note that the intensification of contacts with Tsikhanouskaya and democratic structures may also have a tactical dimension, serving as an instrument of leverage against Lukashenka. Therefore, it remains an open question whether the current rapprochement will evolve into a sustainable strategy of Ukrainian policy toward Belarus, or persist merely as a tool of situational pressure.

Nevertheless, scope for further development of these relations still exists. The most likely trend is the gradual expansion of Ukraine's contacts with those Belarusian democratic forces that demonstrate a clear pro-Ukrainian position, support resistance to Russian aggression, and view a future Belarus as a good-neighborly state independent of Russia. In this context, according to most experts, Kyiv is beginning to draw an even clearer distinction in its policy between Belarusian society and the Lukashenka regime.

1.3 Prospects and factors affecting the dynamics of political relations

Most experts take a skeptical view of the prospects for official political dialogue in the short term. The most likely scenario is considered to be the maintenance of the current level of relations – a kind of stagnation following another round of deterioration. The two sides have already defined mutual 'red lines,' and further escalation of tension does not necessarily serve their interests. Any further worsening of relations with Ukraine creates additional risks for Belarus. At the same time Kyiv may also be interested in maintaining the current level of pressure without further escalation, as far as it has secured public acknowledgment of its demands and demonstrated a readiness to target Belarusian infrastructure.

However, this scenario remains highly unstable. According to respondents, the primary risk is the further involvement of Belarus in Russian aggression. The use of Belarusian territory for a new offensive against Ukraine, the direct entry of Belarusian armed forces into the war, or a significant expansion of Russian military infrastructure in Belarus could rapidly shift the current political confrontation into a military-force dimension. Some experts consider such an escalation scenario, with the possibility of strikes against targets on Belarusian territory, to be likely.

At the same time, the end of the war or a significant de-escalation in the military confrontation with Russian aggression creates an opposite window of opportunity. If a peace process begins, Lukashenka may attempt once again to offer Belarus as a negotiating venue and regain the image of a mediator. However, experts note that under current conditions Belarus' ability to claim such a role is considerably weaker than during the period of the previous Minsk talks: the regime's participation in Russian aggression has significantly undermined its neutral status.

Among the factors that will determine the dynamics, experts identify:

- The course of the war or the path to its conclusion – this factor is cited first by nearly all respondents. The weakening of Russia reduces its influence over the Belarusian regime; however, the use of Belarusian territory for escalation remains possible, including along the border with Poland, Lithuania, or Latvia, which could shift relations into the military sphere;

- The U.S.–Belarus track. On the one hand, negotiations between Washington and Minsk, which began in mid-2025 regarding the release of political prisoners and sanctions relief, provide Lukashenka with a resource to reduce dependence on the Kremlin. On the other hand, a warming along the Minsk–Washington line constrains Ukraine's freedom of action and, according

to some Belarusian experts, became one of the key drivers for the intensification of the Ukrainian track with Belarusian democratic forces.

- The degree of Lukashenka's dependence on the Kremlin, which several experts label as the main constraint: even if Minsk has its own interest in de-escalation, it lacks sufficient autonomy to meet Ukraine's demands;

- The internal political situation in Ukraine. Since experts attribute the 2026 shifts to personnel changes in the Office of the President of Ukraine, subsequent reshuffles could change the trajectory just as swiftly. One respondent explicitly states that the process might need to be restarted after a change in the Ukrainian government;

- Implementation of reached agreements. For the track with democratic forces, experts view the decisive factor not as the breakthrough itself, but as its conversion into signed documents, working groups, and institutional mechanisms;

- The condition and agency of Belarusian democratic forces. Their ability to act in a consolidated manner affects whether Ukraine will see them as a genuine partner rather than as a situational lever.

2. Economic Relations

Index value: 1

Expert assessment of dynamics: slight deterioration

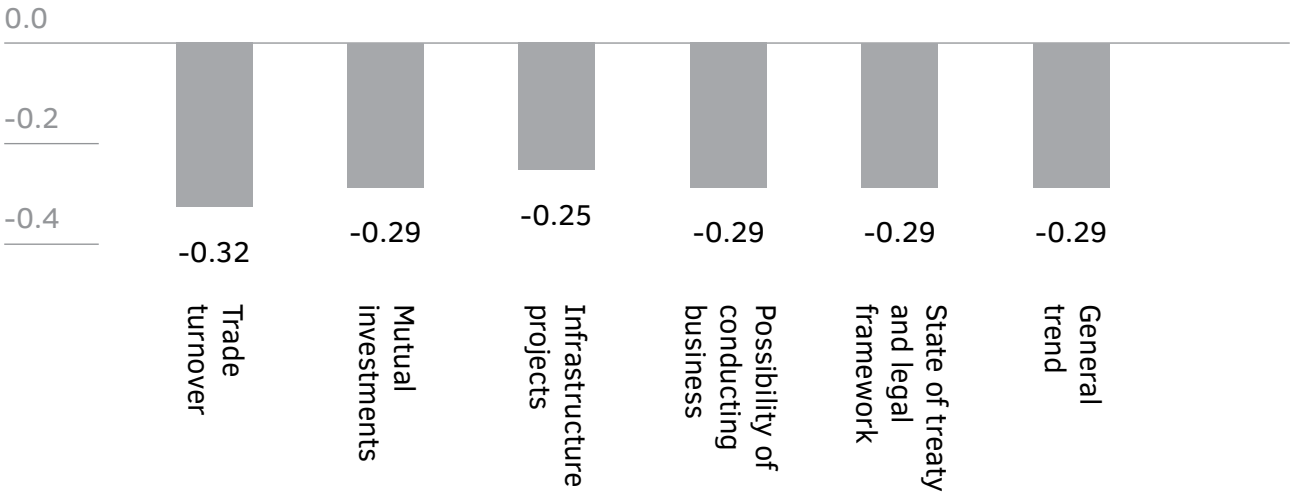


Figure 2. Expert assessment of the dynamics of economic relations, compared with 2025

2.1 Overall Nature of Economic Ties and Trade Dynamics

Economic relations between Belarus and Ukraine have practically ceased since the beginning of Russia's full-scale aggression. Experts generally assess the current level of bilateral trade turnover as zero, while economic ties as fragmented and predominantly indirect. Compared with the pre-war period, there has been not merely a reduction in trade, but a structural breakdown of the previous model of economic interaction.

According to Ukrainian statistics, bilateral trade turnover amounted to approximately USD 23.3 million in 2023, a 98.6% decrease compared with 2022. Ukrainian imports from Belarus amounted to approximately USD 19.8 million, while exports to Belarus stood at just USD 3.5 million. In 2024, trade turnover declined by another 22.9%, to roughly USD 18 million: Ukraine's imports from Belarus amounted to around USD 16.2 million, and exports amounted to just USD 1.7 million. In the first quarter of 2026, trade turnover between the two countries reached only USD 1.7 million, with Ukrainian exports to Belarus falling to zero.

To compare, Belarus was a fairly significant trading partner for Ukraine prior to 2022. According to an estimate cited in the interviews, in 2021 Belarus accounted for about 4.5% of Ukraine's foreign trade turnover, while the share of Belarusian goods in Ukrainian imports was around 6.6%. The main Belarusian export items to Ukraine included petroleum products, mineral and potash fertilisers, chemical products, tractors, freight and urban transport, and other machinery products. Ukraine, in turn, supplied Belarus with agricultural products, metals, food products, and machinery products.

After 2022, these trade flows were either halted or reoriented toward other markets. The reasons included not only the political rupture and sanctions, but also the physical cessation of normal cross-border movement of goods: the border was closed to standard commercial traffic, and the existing infrastructure was effectively removed from economic turnover. An additional factor was the restructuring of the economies of both countries themselves. Ukraine found alternative markets and suppliers, while Belarus reoriented even more heavily toward the Russian market.

Therefore, this is not merely a temporary decline in trade caused by the war. A new structure of economic ties has formed, in which the former Belarusian-Ukrainian interdependence has virtually disappeared. Experts note that both economies have already adapted to the absence of the previous trade flows, and no prospects for a noticeable growth in trade turnover are in sight for the foreseeable future.

2.2 Sectors of Retained or "Grey" Interaction

Despite the near-total cessation of official trade, individual economic ties remain. However, their scale is small, with a significant portion conducted through third countries, intermediaries, and re-export schemes. Several experts independently point to the existence of such channels, while emphasizing the lack of reliable public information about their scale. Possible transit routes mentioned include Azerbaijan, Central Asian countries, EU member states, as well as Middle Eastern countries.

One of the most stable segments remains spare parts and components for Belarusian machinery supplied to Ukraine prior to 2022. Specifically, this involves trucks, urban transport, tractors, and other agricultural equipment. The need for their repair generates limited demand for Belarusian components even after direct supplies have ceased. However, such goods enter via third countries with Belarus indicated as the country of origin.

Another example is glass, supplies of which continued even after the breakdown of direct trade channels. Experts point out that Ukraine experienced a shortage of glass. Thus part of the demand continued to be met through imports, including those of Belarusian origin. Experts cite figures suggesting that in 2023 glass may have accounted for about $15 million of Ukraine's Belarusian imports, and in 2024 – roughly $5.7 million. In some cases, the origin of the goods may have been masked through third countries.

Expert interviews also mention chemical products and fertilizers, agricultural and food products, petroleum products, bitumen, and certain types of technical goods. However, this primarily involves small volumes, legacy contracts, or deliveries via third countries rather than direct trade.

So it is more accurate to speak not of the preservation of fully fledged sectors of cooperation, but rather of retaining specific commodity niches where there is either a technical need for Belarusian products or an opportunity to obtain economic benefits despite political restrictions.

At the same time, experts differ in their assessment of the scale of 'grey' trade. Some believe that a certain volume of private operations continues through intermediaries. Others consider it so small that it has no noticeable impact on the overall picture. Security is also an important constraint: economic interaction with Belarus creates a risk of attracting the attention of security services, so companies are interested in keeping such ties undisclosed. One expert notes that if such attention arises, cooperation may cease quickly.

Special attention is warranted for the economic activity of Belarusian business in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. Interviews note that the Belarusian business structures may still be present there, which led Ukraine to impose sanctions against Belarus, particularly regarding the extraction of grain from occupied territories. These facts point to the economic integration of the Belarusian regime into the Russian system of exploiting the occupied Ukrainian territories.

2.3 Investment and Infrastructure Ties

The situation in the investment sphere is even more clear-cut: there are no new Belarusian-Ukrainian investment projects. Most experts were unable to name a single active major project involving Belarusian capital in Ukraine or Ukrainian capital in Belarus. Individual experts allow for the existence of residual projects or projects that formally maintain links with Belarusian companies, though their scale is unknown. According to official statistics from the National Bank of Ukraine, Belarusian ownership in Ukraine has not been completely liquidated and still exists at approximately one-third of its pre-war volume (around USD 31.1 million). Ukrainian assets in Belarus, on the contrary, have declined to zero.

Interviews provide information about several Belarusian companies that continue to operate in Ukraine. Specifically, the activities of ASBIS, a computer equipment distributor, are mentioned, while certain companies with Belarusian roots also continue operating in Ukraine (EPAM, Wargaming). However, detailed information regarding the number of such companies, ownership structures, and the nature of such projects remains limited – due to the war and the sanctions regime.

Some earlier investment projects by private Belarusian businesses, by contrast, ended in losses for investors. According to one Belarusian expert, entrepreneurs who attempted to establish businesses in Ukraine after 2022 at their own risk faced reprisals and confiscation, and ultimately closed their enterprises. As a result, there have been practically no publicly visible attempts to establish new joint ventures in recent years.

When the war ends, logistics and transit could potentially become the most promising areas following a change in the political situation. One Ukrainian expert notes that the Belarusian route theoretically represents Ukraine's shortest path to Northern Europe. Today, however, this remains purely a future prospect: the current military-political situation makes such a route unacceptable.

Investment and infrastructure ties today should be viewed as frozen potential rather than an actively functioning segment of bilateral relations. Their restoration is possible only upon a fundamental change in the political and military situation.

2.4 Business Opportunities for Citizens of Both Countries

Formally, citizenship itself does not constitute a prohibition on conducting business in the other country. According to expert assessments, Ukrainian citizens can legally register and operate business in Belarus. Similarly, Belarusian citizens can start business in Ukraine upon fulfilling the relevant legalization requirements. However, formal eligibility diverges significantly from actual conditions for doing business.

For Ukrainians in Belarus, the main obstacle is not so much a legal prohibition as the high level of political and administrative risk. Experts point to the risks of encountering unpredictable tax audits and administrative pressure, which ultimately lead to businesses being closed. Ukrainian citizens are also subject to heightened attention from Belarusian security structures. As a result, actual entrepreneurship, especially medium-sized and large business – is assessed as extremely risky.

For Belarusian citizens in Ukraine, the situation has also become significantly more complicated since 2022. Formally, there is no general ban on registering and operating a business. However, severe obstacles include background checks by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), complications with legal residency status, bank accounts, and cross-border payments. Sanctions imposed by Ukraine against Belarusian individuals and legal entities are also perceived as additional risks even for indirect interaction with companies registered in Belarus. Experts note that if the ultimate beneficial owner of a company is a citizen of Belarus, even one who has been permanently residing outside Belarus – establishing a business in Ukraine may in practice be virtually impossible.

Particular importance attaches to the distinction between citizenship and a person's actual political affiliation or status. Belarusian citizens who have lived in Ukraine for a long time, obtained legal status, and have a stable legal position may continue to work and conduct business. However, opening a new business directly in Ukraine, by arriving there as a Belarusian citizen, is significantly more difficult. A similar situation exists for Ukrainians in Belarus, where Ukrainian citizenship attracts heightened suspicion from the regime.

At the same time, experts draw attention to a paradoxical situation: formally, opportunities for Ukrainian citizens in Belarus may in certain cases be broader than for Belarusian citizens in Ukraine; however, this does not imply the presence of a favorable environment for Ukrainian business in Belarus. Political risks, administrative pressure, and the absence of predictability render such activity unattractive.

3. Security Relations

Index value: 1

Expert assessment of dynamics: slight deterioration

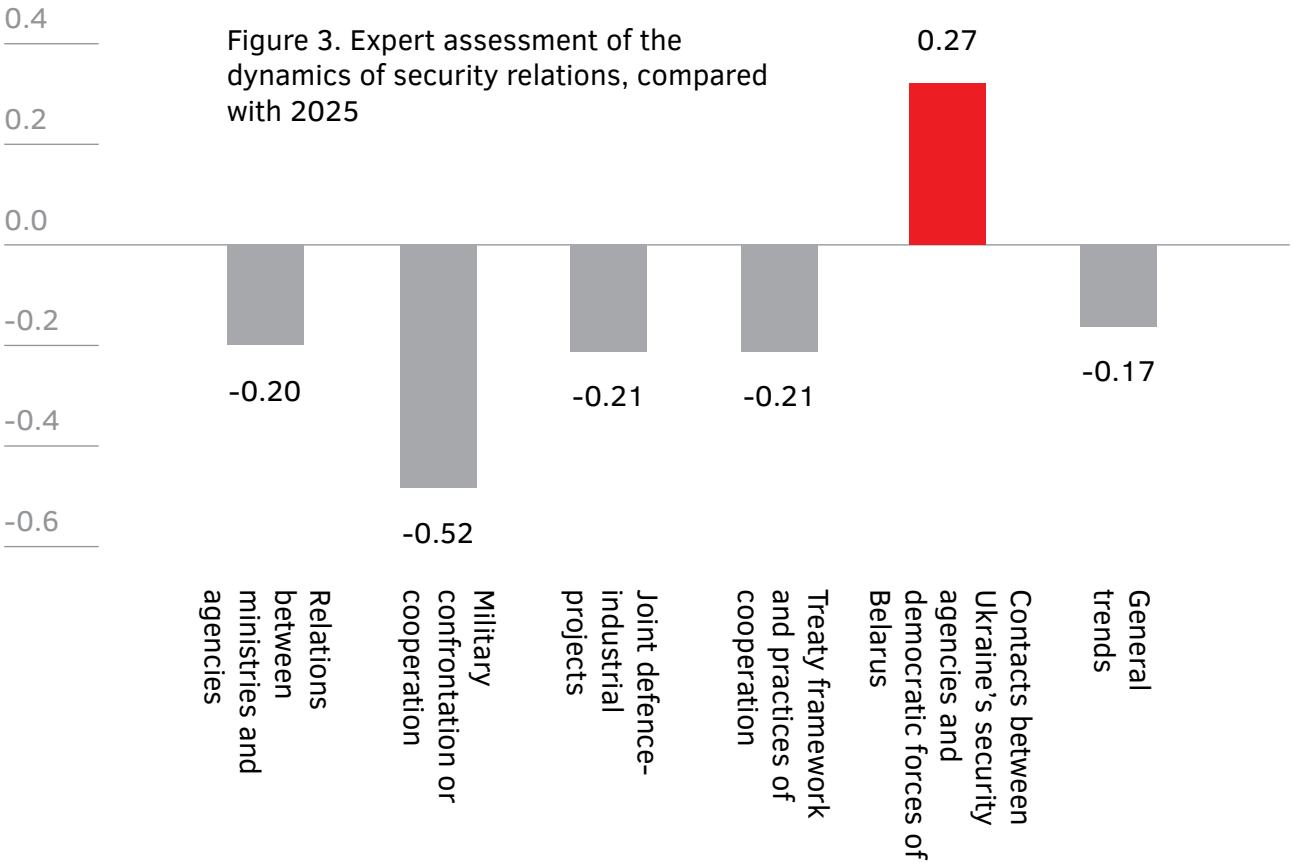


Figure 3. Expert assessment of the dynamics of security relations, compared with 2025

3.1 Overall Nature of Security Relations and Assessment of Military Tension

In the security sphere Belarusian-Ukrainian relations are in a state of highest tension following the withdrawal of Russian troops from Belarusian territory in 2022. Expert assessments vary in their degree of severity – ranging from characterizing the situation as a 'high level of confrontation' to defining it as effectively pre-war, where a single serious incident could trigger direct military hostilities. Experts note a deterioration in all official security relations since 2025. They see particularly significant worsening in the approach toward military confrontation, where the balance of positive and negative evaluations is heavily shifting toward the negative (–0.52).

The primary driver of confrontation remains Belarus' participation in Russian aggression against Ukraine. Belarus remains a military ally of Russia, and its territory is used for military activities, which automatically makes the Belarusian direction a threat to Ukraine's national security system. At the same time, several experts emphasize that the level of confrontation with Belarus is significantly lower than with Russia: the Belarusian army does not directly participate in combat operations against Ukraine, and Minsk is interested in avoiding crossing a certain threshold of direct military involvement.

A major manifestation of this tension remains the military buildup along the shared border. Experts note preparations by both sides for a potential military scenario and the reinforcement of relevant infrastructure. Specifically, one Belarusian expert links the increased risks to the deployment of a new airborne brigade in the Homel region in August 2026. Others draw attention to the increase over the past year in the number of incidents involving drones, the

case of repeaters, and the Ukrainian side's shift towards tougher rhetoric and actions towards the Belarusian regime, including the imposition of new sanctions.

Certain experts point out that the escalation of mutual rhetoric occurs almost annually for various reasons: in 2023 – the potential introduction of Russian nuclear weapons into Belarus took place. In the summer of 2024 – escalation around the border and the deployment of the Belarusian army occurred. The "Zapad-2025" exercises and the introduction of the Russian "Oreshnik" missile system took place in 2025, and in 2026 – the deployment of repeaters happened. A Belarusian expert notes a component of speculative political rhetoric in all these examples:

"To date, there is no confirmation of nuclear weapons being delivered; parts were brought in for the «Oreshnik» but whether the entire system was delivered remains unknown; the border escalation and the «Zapad» exercises yielded no tangible outcomes for either side; the issue with mobile repeaters and its resolution is known only from President Zelensky's words – BelPol speaks of infrastructure construction, but open-source information specifying exactly what this infrastructure entails, is absent".

Another Belarusian respondent also notes that no signs of a buildup of Russian manpower or military equipment along Belarus' southern border have been recorded, and information regarding Russia's use of Belarusian infrastructure for military operations lacks final confirmation. Ukraine, despite high-level statements about an imminent threat, did not appeal to international organizations with this problem or evidence. A similar reservation is made by a Ukrainian expert: apart from the installation of repeaters in 2026, no other real incidents occurred.

The defining feature of the current stage is that military tension is accompanied by limited de-escalation efforts. Despite the absence of political dialogue, experts assess that both parties are seeking to prevent the confrontation from turning into a military clash in an uncontrolled manner. Certain channels for exchanging information remain in place, including on the border situation, military incidents, and other issues where a misinterpretation of the other side's actions could lead to dangerous escalation. One expert notes that such contacts may include the exchange of general information about exercises or troop redeployments upon request – specifically for the purpose of controlling the level of confrontation.

Drone incidents occupy a particular place in this dynamic. Experts note that in some cases the parties exchange signals when the situation involving UAV flights goes beyond the usual level. This indicates the existence of a minimal but functioning mechanism for preventing further escalation.

Thus, the current situation can be described as a managed confrontation. The parties are preparing for potential deterioration while simultaneously maintaining minimal mechanisms that make it possible to prevent accidental escalation. The existence of these mechanisms is one of the few elements of "confidence-building measures" that have survived since 2022.

3.2 Contacts Between Security Structures and Intelligence Services

Interaction between Ukrainian and Belarusian security structures at the official level is absent or reduced to a minimum. However, virtually all expert assessments point to the existence of closed, technical channels of communication between the intelligence services that are maintained despite political confrontation.

The main substance of these contacts consists of humanitarian and de-escalation issues. The most obvious example is the exchange of prisoners of war, which has taken place on Belarusian territory. According to experts, organising such operations would be impossible without the involvement of Belarusian and Ukrainian special services. In addition to prisoner exchanges, the return of individual Ukrainian citizens from occupied territories and from Russia continues through Belarus. An important role here is played by the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, subordinate to the Main Directorate of Intelligence of Ukraine's Ministry of Defence (GUR). The Ukrainian Embassy is not involved

in this process, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, according to one Ukrainian expert, does not always know what is happening in this area. A large group of Belarus' political prisoners was taken to Ukraine at the end of 2025 exactly through this tested prisoner-exchange channel. Kyrylo Budanov, at that time head of the GUR, met them personally.

So, intelligence services to a certain extent fulfill a function that under normal circumstances would be carried out by diplomatic structures. One expert explicitly characterizes them as a kind of substitute for the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in the absence of a full-fledged political and diplomatic dialogue. Messages necessary for resolving humanitarian issues and preventing dangerous escalation can be transmitted through these channels.

Though, this does not imply a restoration of law enforcement cooperation in the traditional sense. There are no grounds to speak of full-fledged operational intelligence sharing, joint crime-fighting, or other forms of institutional interaction typical of peacetime. Contacts are narrow, situational, and predominantly anti-crisis in nature.

The peculiar two-tier model has formed in the sphere of security structures. At the public and institutional levels, relations are characterized by confrontation and a lack of dialogue. At the closed level, minimal contacts necessary for resolving humanitarian issues and preventing the most dangerous scenarios are maintained.

3.3 Relations with the Belarusian Volunteer Movement and Challenges of Interaction

Belarusian (military) volunteers represent a distinct and paradoxical element of Ukrainian-Belarusian relations in the security sphere. On the one hand, they are Belarusian citizens fighting on Ukraine's side against Russia, and their participation in the war has both Ukrainian and Belarusian dimensions. On the other hand, Ukrainian security structures view them primarily as foreign military servicemen integrated into Ukraine's defence system.

Belarusian volunteers have been participating in the war on Ukraine's side since 2014, and their presence became significantly more visible after the start of the full-scale invasion. The most prominent formation remains the Kastuś Kalinoŭski Regiment. However, Belarusian citizens also serve in other units of the Ukraine's Defence Forces. Their motivation combines defending Ukraine with opposing Russian influence and the Lukashenka regime: many volunteers view Russia's defeat as a necessary condition for future political changes in Belarus.

Expert assessments of the nature of Ukraine's interaction with the Belarusian volunteer movement remain fairly positive. One expert speaks of a stable position of Belarusian (military) volunteer units within the structure of the Ukraine's Defence Forces. Others note the presence of constant contacts between representatives of Belarusian military volunteer structures and Ukrainian military and infrastructure units. At the same time, in previous years, experts highlighted the key role of Belarusian volunteers in maintaining Ukraine's interaction with Belarusian democratic forces and their pivotal contribution to sustaining a positive image of Belarusians and their contribution to Ukraine's struggle for freedom. Now the number of such positive comments has decreased, while some experts note a decline in the number of Belarusian volunteers and a reduction in their public visibility. There are also isolated statements that the Kalinoŭski Regiment in fact has ceased to exist in the form it had in previous years.

The primary issue lies in differing understandings of the desired integration model. For the Ukrainian command, the priority is to incorporate volunteers into a unified system of command of Ukraine's Defence Forces. A significant proportion of Belarusian volunteers, by contrast, seek to preserve their national organisational identity and regard their units as a potential foundation for a future Belarusian army. The Ukrainian side is not interested in granting them substantial autonomy, whereas autonomy remains an essential part of the motivation for certain volunteers.

Another major issue is the legal status of military volunteers. It encompasses matters of legalization, documentation, citizenship, social guarantees, service pay, and compensation in the event of injury or death. The problem becomes particularly acute after an individual's

direct participation in hostilities ends. Experts highlight veterans' challenges with rehabilitation, documentation, legalization, and obtaining citizenship.

Yet another challenge is the limitation of professional military career trajectories. According to expert assessments, career advancement opportunities for Belarusian volunteers can be constrained. Specifically,

there is a demand for them to be able to become officers and sergeants rather than remaining predominantly at the rank-and-file level. From the Belarusian perspective, this is viewed as an important element in developing the future potential of the Belarusian armed forces.

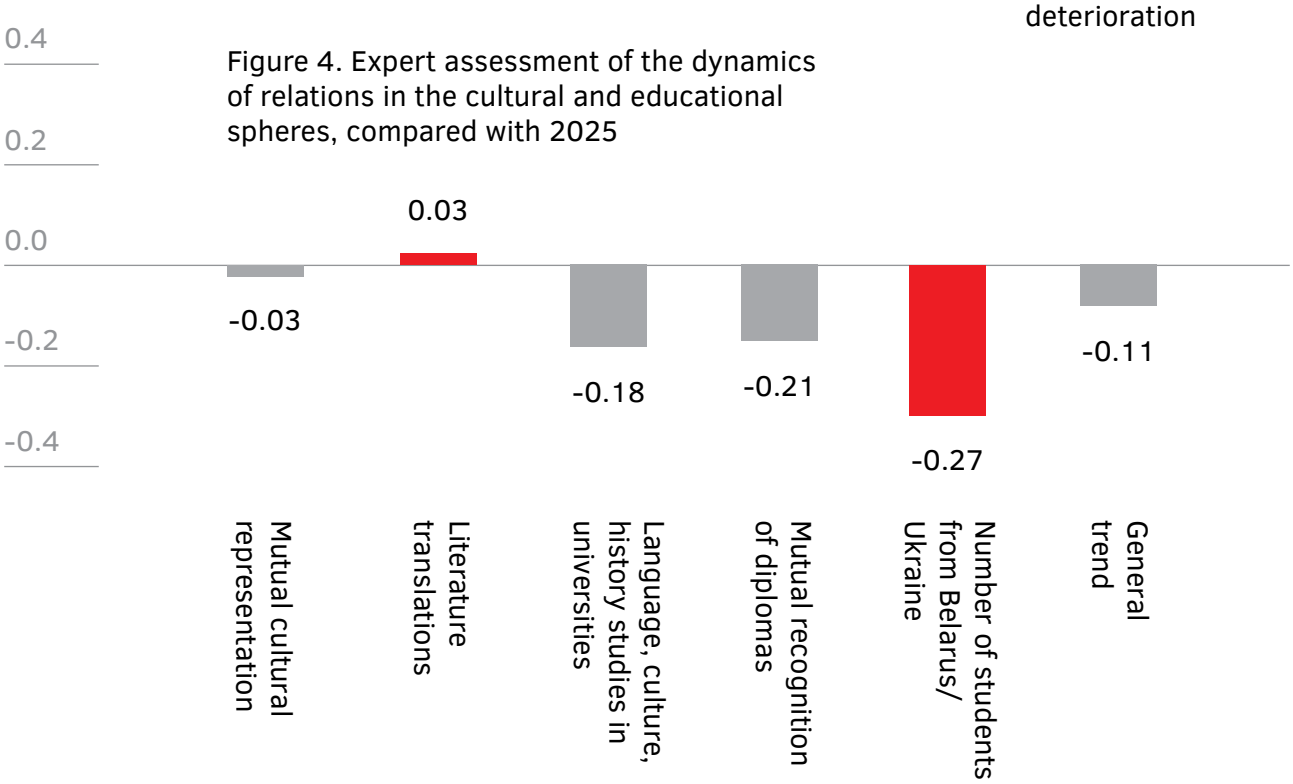
Finally, security considerations also represent a significant factor. The Ukrainian side objectively treats foreign volunteers with greater caution than its own citizens. Experts note the potential for Russian agents or recruited individuals to infiltrate foreign volunteer ranks, which creates additional constraints on their deployment and autonomy. Nevertheless, the overall assessment remains predominantly positive: Belarusian volunteers are regarded as a defence resource for Ukraine and as a potentially significant element of future Belarusian-Ukrainian relations in the security domain.

4. Cultural and educational relations

Index value: 1

Expert assessment of dynamics: slight deterioration

Figure 4. Expert assessment of the dynamics of relations in the cultural and educational spheres, compared with 2025



4.1 Overall State of Cultural and Educational Ties

Cultural and educational ties between Belarus and Ukraine have virtually ceased to exist at the official interstate level since 2022. Experts almost unanimously characterize the situation as frozen or near zero. Institutional contacts between universities, research institutions, and state cultural organisations have been suspended; there are no regular exchanges of students or scholars.

The rupture affected not only practical contacts but also the formal regulatory framework of cooperation. Ukraine terminated its participation in relevant agreements with Belarus in the sphere of education and science: specifically, experts highlight the termination of the agreement on cooperation in higher and postgraduate education. The termination of mutual recognition of educational diplomas is noted separately: the relevant agreements were denounced by Ukraine in 2022–2023.

The political situation has a decisive impact on these relations. For the Ukrainian side, state-run Belarusian universities and scientific institutions are today viewed through the prism of Belarus' involvement in Russian aggression. Therefore, cooperation with them is not only politically undesirable, but in a number of cases directly restricted or severed. Meanwhile in Belarus independent Belarusian culture and education are themselves under pressure from the state and Russian cultural and ideological influence. This further shrinks the space for any Ukrainian-Belarusian contacts within Belarus.

Student exchanges have also vanished. According to expert assessments, student flows between the two countries drastically collapsed after 2022, and the prospects for their restoration within the framework of relations

between state institutions are evaluated very skeptically. At the same time, individual cases of Belarusian citizens studying in Ukraine do exist; however, these are primarily individuals residing outside Belarus – for example, in Poland, Lithuania, or Latvia – rather than the traditional flow of students directly between the two countries.

The former model of cultural and educational relations, based on direct institutional contacts, has disappeared. However, this does not imply the complete disappearance of Belarusian-Ukrainian cultural interaction. It has shifted to a different environment – primarily to the sphere of civic initiatives, independent cultural organizations, diasporas, and Belarusian democratic structures, with part of such interaction taking place outside Belarus and Ukraine, particularly in EU countries.

4.2 Examples of Current Interaction in the Sphere of Culture and Education

Amid an institutional rupture, independent cultural organizations and civic initiatives have become virtually the sole sustainable channel for Belarusian-Ukrainian cultural interaction. Several experts independently of one another note that such contacts continue to exist, although they are limited in scale, depend on particular individuals and projects, and have not yet developed into a systemic policy.

One of the most visible remaining directions of cooperation is literary exchange and translation activity. Despite the near-total cessation of state publishing contacts, independent Ukrainian publishers and Belarusian publishers in exile continue to translate and publish Belarusian and Ukrainian authors. Among the examples, experts name books by Belarusian authors Ales Plotka, Alhierd Bacharevič, and Dzmitry Strotsau.

The House of Europe program supported translations of Belarusian literature in Ukraine and became a particularly significant example of cooperation. Thanks to this programme, Ukrainian translations of Ales Plotka's "Sozh" book (translated by Viachaslau Liavitski) and Alhierd Bacharevič's "Children of Alindarka" (translated by Losik Panasiuk and Daryna Hladun) appeared in Ukraine's largest bookshop chains in 2026. Experts assess this outcome positively, though also note its isolated nature and the absence, for now, of a sustainable funding system for such projects.

Another direction – joint cultural events and creative residencies, primarily in EU countries. Belarusian and Ukrainian musicians collaborate, hold joint concerts, and engage in creative partnerships; artists participate in shared residencies. The activities of the Belarusian Council for Culture and individual Belarusian cultural figures who maintain ties with Ukrainian colleagues are also mentioned. However, these contacts remain fragmented and personal rather than institutional.

A certain infrastructure of Belarusian cultural and civic life is also taking shape in Ukraine. Experts cite, for example, the activities of Belarusian organisations in Lviv, where Belarusian-language courses and cultural exhibitions are held and the Museum of Belarusian Volunteers operates. A photo exhibition was held at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Zaporizhzhia in August 2026. It was dedicated to the combat history of the Kalinoŭski Regiment and prepared by their community and the press service. The exhibition featured more than 100 photographs of Belarusian volunteers.

There is also an example of educational activity for Belarusian children residing outside Belarus. One such example is a remote Ukrainian-Belarusian school operating for Belarusian children in Ukraine and abroad – the "First Belarusian Online School in Ukraine" (byschool.com.ua). Also Belarusian democratic forces are considering the possibility of more systematically involving Belarusian students and teachers in Ukrainian educational institutions. However, implementing these plans requires resolving issues related to legalisation, security, the language of instruction, and identifying interested Ukrainian universities.

Historical and intellectual projects, as well as expert platforms are acquiring particular significance. The Ostrozky Forum has emerged as a promising platform bringing together Belarusian and Ukrainian researchers, civil society representatives, and cultural and political figures. One of the outcomes of the Forum's historical panel was the idea of

establishing a public Belarusian-Ukrainian historical commission.

There are several rare courses related to Belarusian topics or programmes tailored to Belarusians in Ukraine within Ukraine's higher education system. There is a program titled "Russian Studies: Politics, Economics, and Ideology of Contemporary Russia" at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. One of the disciplines within its framework is "Integration and Disintegration Processes Between the Authoritarian Regimes of the Russian Federation and Belarus".

The Belarusian studies track is preserved within the program "Belarusian Language and Literature, Ukrainian Language and Literature, English Language" in the bachelor's program at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. A program for humanitarian support of the Belarusian community in southern Ukraine was adopted at the Izmail State University of Humanities on the initiative of the public organization 'Belarusian Community of Ukraine' in March 2026. Within its framework, the 'Belarusian Educational Program at ISUH' was launched for the wives of deceased Belarusian military volunteers: it provides free access to higher education, retraining, professional development, and academic support for their professional self-realization.

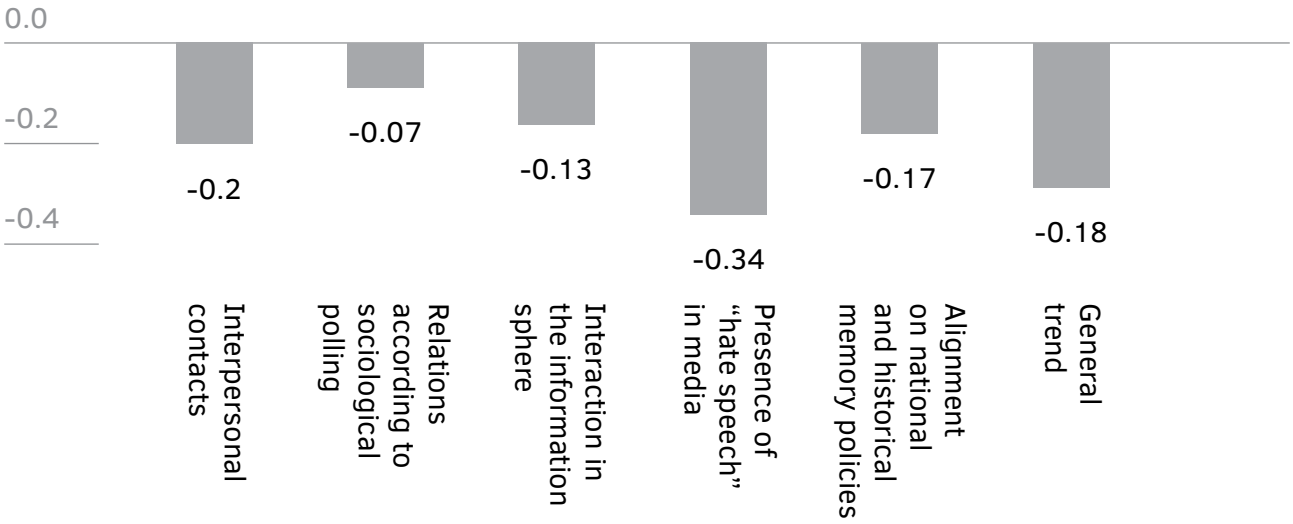
Current interaction in culture and education, according to experts, is more a matter of "bridges to the future" than a full-fledged cultural exchange. A small group of active individuals and organisations remained, maintaining contacts on the basis of professional, civic, or personal solidarity. They are precisely the ones creating a reserve that can be mobilized if the political situation changes.

5. Relations Between Societies

Index value: 2

Expert assessment of dynamics: slight deterioration

Figure 5. Expert assessment of the dynamics of relations between societies, compared with 2025



5.1 Overall State of Relations Between Societies

Relations between Belarusian and Ukrainian societies deteriorated noticeably since the start of the full-scale war. However, the same degree of rupture that has occurred at the interstate level has not taken place at the level of interpersonal relations. This is one of the important differences between the societal and interstate dimensions: while political and military relations are virtually frozen, personal, family, professional, and civic ties are preserved to a certain extent.

Experts note that the war has dramatically reduced the intensity of contacts, travel, and mutual communication, but did not eliminate them. According to one expert estimate, roughly 7–8% of Ukrainians, who have been surveyed, continue to maintain contact with Belarusians in one way or another. At the same time, the frequency of such contacts is declining as the war continues and security requirements tighten.

Public perception also experienced a deterioration, but it has not taken the form of complete mutual hostility. According to survey data from the Ukrainian research company Rating Group in August 2026, 90% of Ukrainians held a negative view of Aliaksandr Lukashenka, and 83% considered Belarus' attitude toward Ukraine to be hostile. At the same time, 70% of Ukrainians held a cold attitude toward Belarusians themselves (with 44% being very cold), while 30% of Ukrainians maintained a positive-neutral attitude toward Belarusians. According to experts, this structure of perception formed as early as 2022 and did not change significantly in the subsequent period.

This makes it possible to speak less of a continuing radicalisation of public attitudes than of a stable negative image of Belarus formed under the influence of the war.

For Ukrainian society, the primary source of negative attitudes toward Belarus remains its involvement in Russian aggression. Experts note that two parallel positions have developed in Ukraine. One part of society understands the distinction between Belarus and the Lukashenka regime, while another part tends to perceive Belarusians as part of a broader Russian space, based on the fact that Belarusian territory was used by Russian troops.

The situation appears different in Belarus. Experts note that attitudes toward Ukrainians at the everyday level, according to available assessments, remain rather positive or neutral. Even Belarusian state propaganda makes a certain distinction between the Ukrainian population and the Ukrainian political leadership. As a result, anti-Ukrainian rhetoric does not always transform into everyday hostility toward Ukrainians as people or a nation.

This does not mean that negative attitudes are absent though. Constant exposure to Russian and Belarusian state propaganda gradually forms a distorted perception of the causes of the war and the responsibility of the parties among a portion of the population. Experts believe that prolonged consumption of such narratives may gradually change people's everyday perceptions within Belarus, even if they do not directly support the Lukashenka regime.

Generally relations between our societies can be characterized as weakened, yet retaining significant potential for recovery. A substantial portion of the negative dynamics is linked not to a change in the attitudes of Belarusians and Ukrainians toward each other as peoples, but to the war, propaganda, and restrictions on opportunities for direct communication.

5.2 The Image of the Other Country in the Media Space, Propaganda, and Hate Speech

A strong asymmetry is observed in the information space. State information policy in Belarus regarding Ukraine is almost fully integrated into the Russian propaganda narrative. Experts note the use of anti-Ukrainian rhetoric and hate speech towards Ukraine's political and military-political leadership, repeating Russian talking points. At the same time, Belarusian propaganda may somewhat soften the most radical Russian formulations – for example, using direct accusations of all Ukrainians of Nazism less frequently – yet the fundamental framework remains pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian.

A characteristic feature of Belarusian propaganda is the combination of anti-Ukrainian political rhetoric with the narrative of a "triune Slavic people". Lukashenka can simultaneously criticize the Ukrainian leadership and assert that Ukraine should return to the 'fold of the Slavic nations'. Ukraine is thereby presented not as an independent political nation, but as part of a historically and culturally unified space with Russia and Belarus.

At the same time, it is important to distinguish hate speech towards Ukrainians as a people from the political demonization of Ukraine and its leadership. According to expert assessments, a fairly positive everyday attitude towards Ukrainians remain in Belarus. The propaganda model tends to create categories of "correct" and "incorrect" Ukrainians: the Ukrainian population may be viewed positively when it is presented as a victim of the war or as being unconnected with the current Ukrainian authorities, while Ukraine's political leadership is subjected to harsh attacks.

The Ukrainian information space is structured differently. Experts note the presence of both major media outlets that clearly distinguish between the Belarusian people and the Lukashenka regime, as well as smaller media outlets, bloggers, and individual commentators who do not make this distinction. The image of Belarus in the Ukrainian information space is therefore heterogeneous. Overall, it has become significantly more negative since 2022; however, this does not imply a unified attitude toward Belarusians as people.

Experts record certain shifts in Ukraine's information field in 2026. Thanks to Tsikhanouskaya's visit and meetings with Zelensky, Ukrainian independent media started to pay greater attention to the democratic forces of Belarus. Following Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's visit, reports appeared in the news, including on Suspilne, the essence of which was: "the Belarusian people are not our enemy; Belarusians are fighting alongside us, Belarusians are helping us; Lukashenka is our enemy, but not the Belarusian people". However, it is difficult to assess how sustainable this trend will prove to be. At the same time in early 2026 the Ukrainian authorities took a sharper stance regarding Belarus, speaking of an imminent threat, which also affects the information space.

Thus, the information environment is one of the main drivers behind the deterioration of relations between the societies. In Belarus anti-Ukrainian rhetoric is a part of the state propaganda system and is closely linked to Russian narratives. In Ukraine, the negative image of Belarus is formed primarily by the actual actions of the Belarusian regime and the use of the country's territory in the war, but is supplemented by more generalized perceptions that do not always take into account the fact that a significant part of Belarusian society actively resisted the regime back in 2020, ended up in exile precisely as a result of that resistance, and today actively helps Ukraine – as volunteers, humanitarian and medical aid, and by documenting the regime's crimes.

Crucially, however, hate speech has not become completely dominant in relations between societies. Space remains for separating the regime from Belarusian society, as well as for a positive perception of Belarusians who oppose Russian aggression or support Ukraine.

5.3 People-to-People Contacts and Cross-Border Interaction

Personal contacts between Belarusians and Ukrainians persist, but the opportunities for maintaining them have been significantly reduced. The primary obstacle is the restriction on cross-border movement. Experts note that only one direct border crossing is actually operating between the two countries, and that travel across the border has become practically impossible.

Entry into Ukraine is also problematic for Belarusians residing in exile in EU countries. Formally, entry rules and visa requirements may remain unchanged; however, actual control has tightened significantly: lengthy background checks, interrogations, and additional questioning by security agencies occur, frequently resulting in entry bans without explanation.

Nevertheless, family and personal ties continue to exist. People maintain contact with relatives, friends, and former colleagues using available communication channels and, where possible, in-person meetings. One expert emphasizes that if the political situation changes, these contacts could be restored relatively quickly because the social foundation for them has not disappeared.

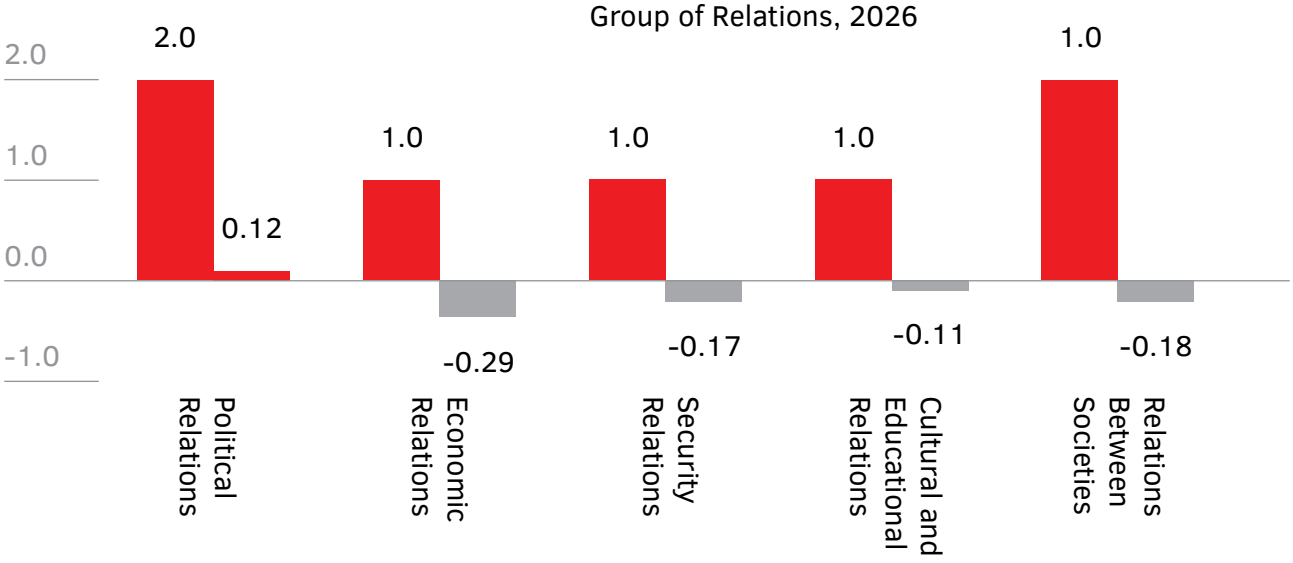
Special attention should be paid to the population of border regions, where family, trade, and everyday ties were intensive historically. The war has sharply restricted these ties but has not destroyed them. A Ukrainian expert points to Belarus' opening of the border for collecting wild plants – mushrooms and berries – in border forests as a revealing development in 2026. The practice of simplified border crossings for residents of border areas existed previously as well, but this year Lukashenka announced it publicly. At the same time, the expert draws attention to the interpretation given to this fact by Belarusian propaganda: that the channel was allegedly opened so that Ukrainians could escape hard living conditions and move to a prosperous Belarus…"that means they feel sorry for us: life is hard for you, come to us, things are better here".

So, interpersonal contacts are currently at a low, but not critically low, level.

They are significantly weaker than before the (full scale) war, though the social fabric of communication has not been destroyed. When the political situation changes, contacts between people could potentially be restored much more quickly than interaction between interstate institutions.

6. Overall Index Value 2026

Table 1. Index Value and Expert Assessment of Dynamics (trend) by Group of Relations, 2026



Overall Index Value (Median)
Index Value 1.0
Trend -0.08

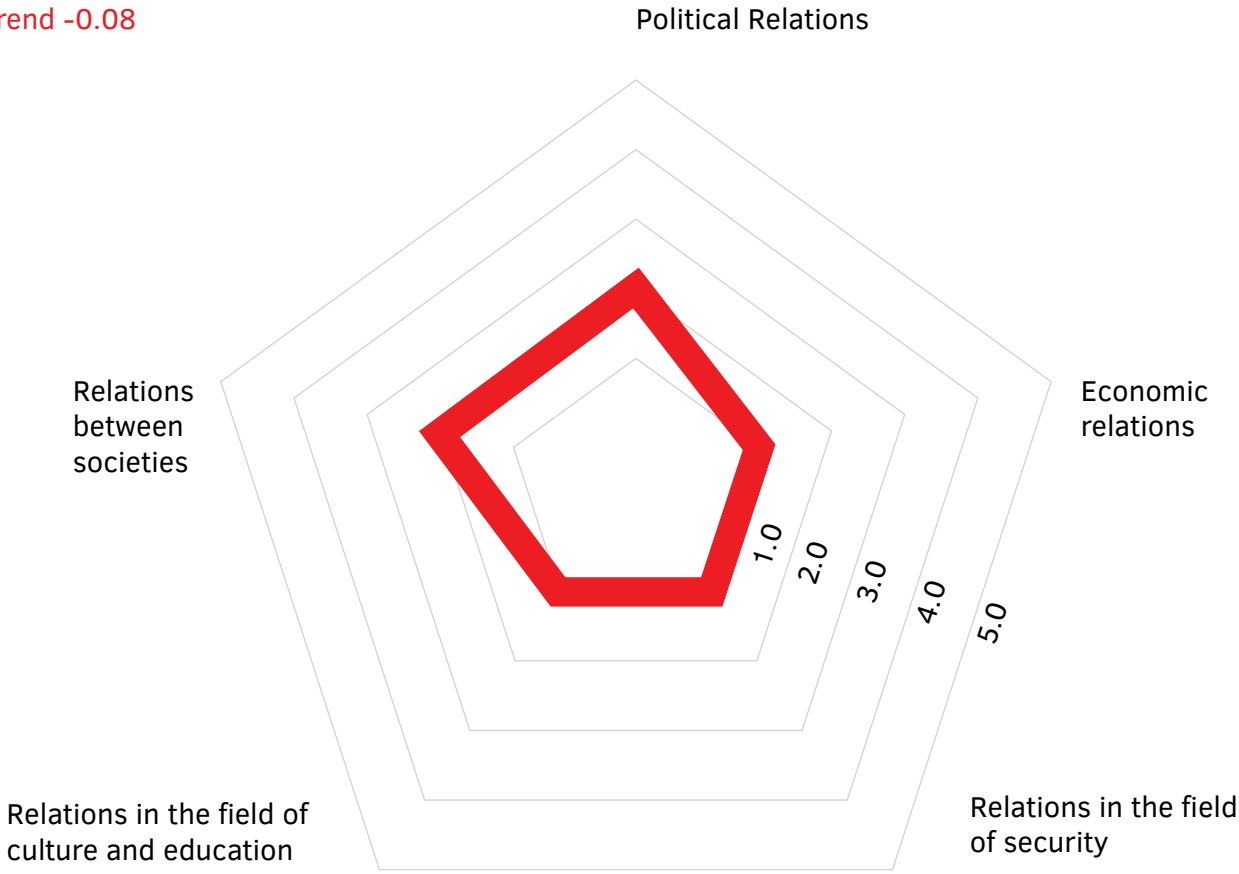
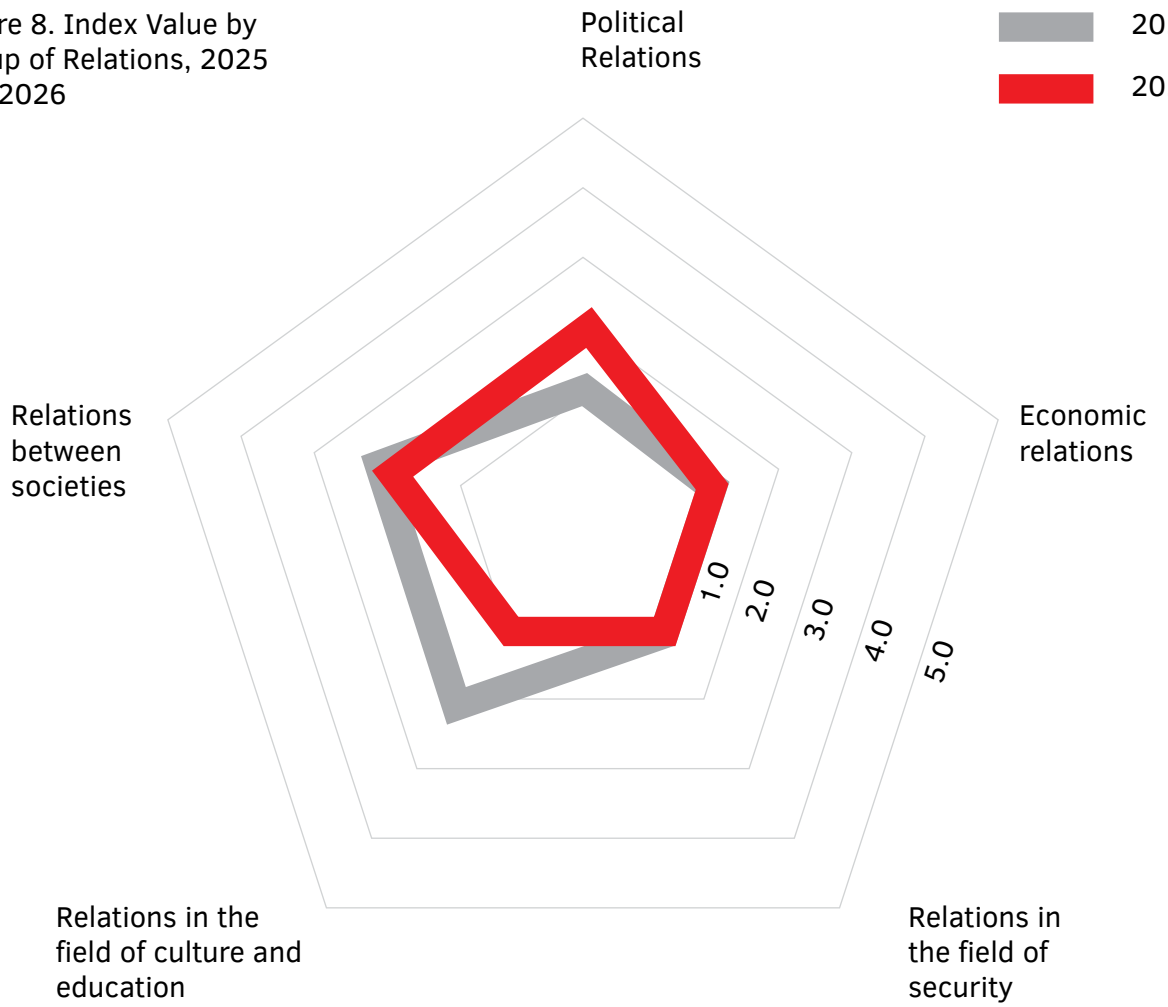


Figure 7. Index Value by Group of Relations, 2026

Figure 8. Index Value by Group of Relations, 2025 and 2026



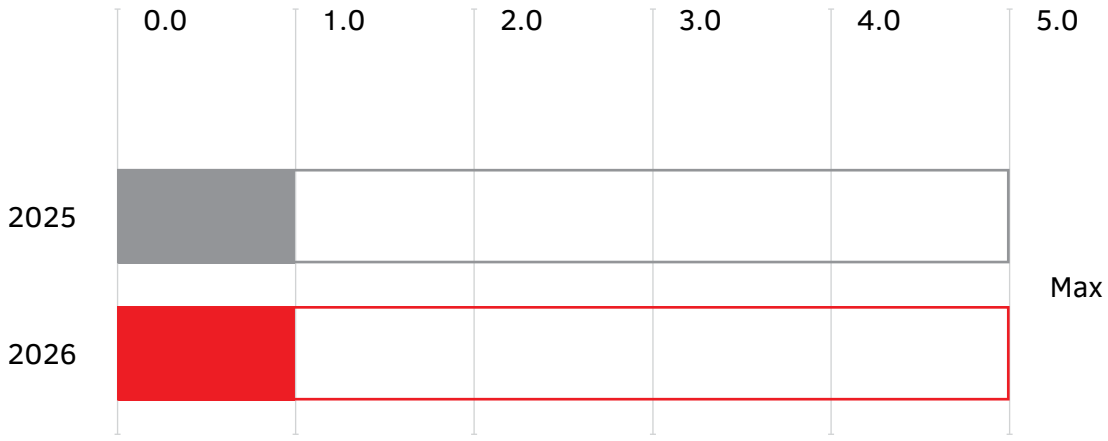


Figure 9. Overall Index Value, 2025 and 2026

7. Prospects for the development of relations

The prospects for Belarusian-Ukrainian relations in the coming years, according to expert respondents, will be determined primarily by the outcomes of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the nature of the subsequent transformation of regional security. Expert assessments show that it is virtually impossible to bring bilateral relations out of their current crisis independently: so long as Belarus remains a military ally of Russia, the space for normalization remains extremely constrained. At the same time, even under current conditions, certain individual technical and humanitarian communication channels remain and could serve as a basis for gradual de-escalation.

The most likely scenario in the short term is the preservation of the current model of 'cold confrontation': minimal official contacts, lack of diplomatic dialogue, high military tension, and, at the same time, the preservation of closed communication channels on security and humanitarian issues. Experts do not expect any significant improvement in relations between Kyiv and official Minsk without a fundamental change in the military and political situation.

However, two fundamentally different scenarios are possible. The escalation scenario is tied to further Belarusian involvement in the Russia's war – primarily through the repeated use of Belarus' territory for aggression or the direct entry of the Belarusian army into hostilities. In this case, relations could shift from the current managed confrontation to direct military confrontation.

The de-escalation scenario entails the end of the war or a significant reduction in its intensity, Belarus' refusal of further military involvement, and the emergence of political space for negotiations. In this case, according to expert estimates, a cautious political warming could take place first, followed by a gradual restoration of economic and then official cultural and educational ties.

In the economic domain, the most realistic prospect after the end of active hostilities appears to be the gradual restoration of trade, transport and logistics links, and cross-border interaction. However, a return to the pre-war model is not automatic and will more likely require establishing a new form of relations. Ukraine and Belarus have already adapted their foreign economic ties and follow different trajectories of economic integration. Restoration will take time and will evidently depend on political decisions, the sanctions regime, and the degree of normalization of relations.

The change in the nature of Ukraine's relations with Belarusian democratic forces is of particular importance. Unlike relations with official Minsk, this track demonstrates positive dynamics. Following the elevation of contacts to a high political level, opportunities have emerged to move from predominantly symbolic interaction to practical projects and institutional formats. Experts expect further progress specifically along this track.

Horizontal ties between societies also represent a promising resource. Despite the sharp reduction in contacts, family, professional, and cultural ties have not disappeared. In the case of de-escalation, they may be restored more quickly than interstate ties. A similar role can be played by independent civic and cultural organizations, the Belarusian diaspora, and educational initiatives: even today, they remain virtually the sole channel for positive interaction.

So, the key question regarding prospects is not the restoration of former Belarusian-Ukrainian relations, but the formation of a new model. If the current regime remains in power in Belarus, this model will most likely remain limited in the depth of interaction. Under a democratic transformation of Belarus, the potential for relations would be considerably greater: Ukraine could become one of the key partners of a new Belarus in security, economy,

infrastructure, education, and culture. Existing contacts with Belarusian democratic forces and horizontal ties between societies create a certain foundation for this.

Over the next 2–3 years, the most likely scenario is a gradual one: the preservation of high political and military tension alongside the development of individual channels of pragmatic interaction and further strengthening Ukraine's contacts with Belarusian democratic forces. A substantial improvement in relations with official Minsk will be possible only following shifts in the broader military-political context.

Appendix.Reference data on specific parameters

Current State of the Treaty and Legal Framework Between the States (Parameter 1d, Political Relations)

The overall scope of regulation of bilateral relations between Belarus and Ukraine comprises 483 normative legal acts, which include not only interstate treaties but also memoranda, protocols, and decisions of a national or interagency nature. Of this total, 143 documents have ceased to be in force, and another 17 are pending termination. A total of 323 documents have no termination date and nominally remain in force.

Dynamics of denunciations by year: 2022 – 32 documents, 2023 – 37, 2024 – 19, 2025 – 19, 2026 – 36. Following the slowdown in 2024–2025, the pace in 2026 nearly doubled, returning to the level of the first year of the war. Of the 36 documents terminated in 2026, 16 were decisions adopted within the CIS, 10 were agreements, 7 were intergovernmental agreements, and 3 were other documents.

By subject matter, among the 143 documents terminated since 2022, security and defence predominate (44), followed by borders and migration (14), education and science (13), the economy and trade (11), transport (8), and culture and the information sphere (8).

Of those that formally remain in force, nearly half were signed in 1992–1996. By subject matter, these include CIS decisions (49), the economy and trade (47), borders and migration (25), and transport (20).

It is noteworthy that 17 intergovernmental agreements already have designated termination dates ranging from October 9, 2026, to March 22, 2031. This demonstrates that the denunciation of the treaty framework with Belarus is not a series of isolated actions, but a planned process of reviewing Ukrainian legislation.

State of Mutual Trade Between Countries (Characteristics of Exports, Imports, and Trade Balance) (Parameter 2a, Economic Relations)

Period	Imports from Belarus	Exports to Belarus	Turnover	Dynamics	Import Positions	Export Positions
2022	1 421,1	186,1	1 607,2	—	440	478
2023	19,8	3,5	23,3	–98,6 %	60	4
2024	16,2	1,7	18,0	–22,9 %	46	3
2025	3,9	0,0	3,9	–78,5 %	35	0
2026, January–July	1,7	0,0	1,7	—	19	0

Table 2. Foreign Trade of Ukraine with the Republic of Belarus, 2022–2026, USD million

Source: National Bank of Ukraine

Main commodity positions in imports from Belarus in 2026: parts and accessories for motor vehicles; parts intended for engines; transmission mechanisms; pumps for liquids, liquid elevators; internal combustion piston engines.

State of Mutual Investments. Presence of Joint Investment Projects at the Level of the State or Private Business (Parameter 2b, Economic Relations)

Period	Balance: Belarus–Ukraine	Balance: Ukraine–Belarus	Net transactions during the period: Belarus–Ukraine
31.03.2022	78,3	3,7	+1,7 (I кв.)
31.12.2022	65,2	1,0	−26,3
31.12.2023	50,8	0,8	−8,1
31.12.2024	36,7	0,1	−4,5
31.12.2025	21,0	н/д	−3,1
31.03.2026	31,1	0,0	−0,1 (I кв.)

Table 3. Direct Investment Between Belarus and Ukraine, 2022–2026, USD million

Source: National Bank of Ukraine

Data on investment positions show that Belarusian property in Ukraine has not been completely liquidated – roughly one-third of the pre-war volume still exists. The transactions column shows that this remaining balance is constantly shrinking: over four years, the net outflow amounted to about USD 42 million. The only quarter with a net inflow from Belarus was the first quarter of 2022 – that is, prior to the outbreak of the full-scale invasion. Ukrainian investments in Belarus literally dropped to zero, falling from USD 3.7 million in March 2022 to zero in March 2026.

Organisers and Authors of the Study

The study was implemented by the Free Belarus Center with the support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation and in cooperation with the Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” (Ukraine). Special thanks are expressed to the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya for assistance in conducting the study.



Andrei Yahorau

Civic activist, Belarusian methodologist, and political scientist. Since 1999, he has progressed from a rank-and-file volunteer in civil-society organisation to a leader of major public organizations and initiatives. He is the Chairman of the Board of the international NGO ‘EuroBelarus’. In 2013–2015, he served as National Coordinator of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) for Belarus, and in 2014–2015 was a Co-Chair of the Steering Committee of the Civil Society Forum. In 2022–2023 Coordinator for International Assistance at the Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Speaker of the second convocation of the Coordination Council of Belarus in 2023–2024. Participant in the Minsk methodological community and colleague of Belarusian philosopher Uladzimir Matskevich.



Yevhen Mahda

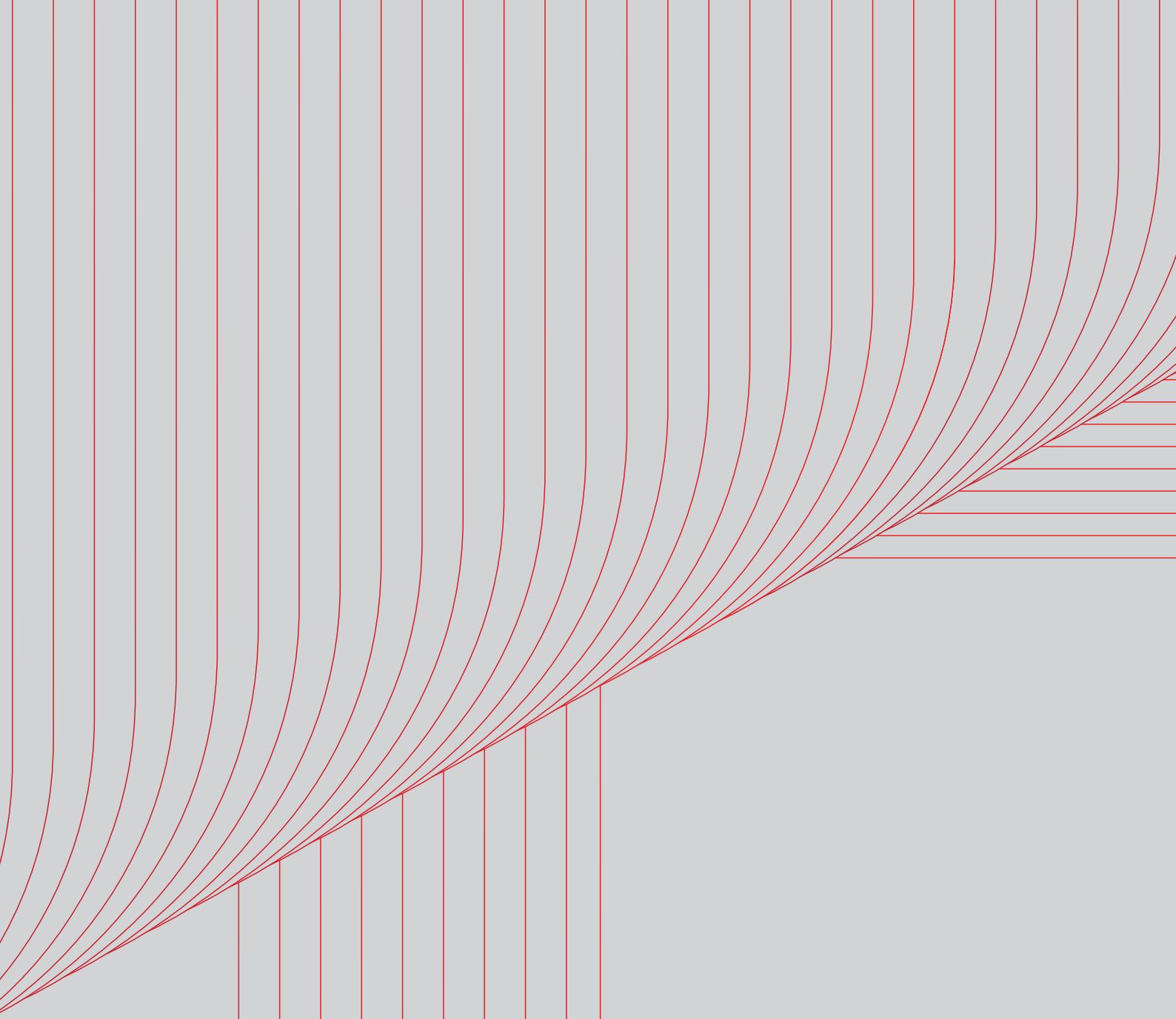
Candidate of Political Sciences, Associate Professor. Graduated with honours from the Faculty of History of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv in 1996. In 2006, he defended his dissertation on “The Regional Conflict in the Middle East in the Global Context”. Professor at the State University “Kyiv Aviation Institute”. Author of the studies: “Hybrid War: Survive and Win” (Kharkiv, 2015) and “Russia’s Hybrid Aggression: Lessons for Europe” (Kyiv, 2017). Co-authored the book Game of Reflections: How the World Sees Ukraine (Kharkiv, 2016) with Tetiana Vodaturska. In 2017, the book The Sixth. Memories of the Future – a study of Ukrainian presidents – was published by the Family Leisure Club Publishing. Since January 2018, he has served as Director of the NGO ‘Institute of World Policy’. Expert at iSANS.



Rosa Turarbekova

Doctor of Historical Sciences. Graduated from the Faculty of History of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (KazNU) (1987–1992) and completed postgraduate studies in 'History of International Relations and Foreign Policy' (1992–1995), defending her doctoral dissertation on 'Foreign Policy of the President of Russia (Theoretical and Practical Aspects)' in 1997. Lecturer at the Department of International Relations of KazNU (1993–1996), Deputy Dean of the Faculty of International Relations at 'Kainar' University (Almaty) (1997–1998). Associate Professor at Belarusian State University (1999–2022), activist of the Free Trade Union at BSU, visiting research fellow at Justus Liebig University Giessen (Germany) and DAAD scholarship holder (September 2022–April 2023), honorary fellow of the IGSD (University of Warwick, UK). Research interests: Eurasian regional organizations and integration projects, the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus, Islamism, and political processes in Central Asia. Today, the researcher's scientific interest focuses on the study of the so-called 'Union State' of Belarus and Russia.

Notes



FREE BELARUS CENTER

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG