



United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus in Exile Active in Its First Year

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During its first year of activity, the Belarusian transitional cabinet formed in exile by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya consolidated its political position, worked on reform projects and sought support from other countries for Belarusian independence. The Belarusian authorities see this as a threat and have taken a number of steps to obstruct the actions of the interim government in the international arena. It is therefore necessary for Western countries to provide systemic support to the Tsikhanouskaya cabinet so that it can continue to function and prepare a comprehensive reform plan.

The United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus was established in August 2022 by Belarusian opposition activists who were forced to leave the country for fear of persecution. It is headed by [2020 presidential election](#) candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and has seven plenipotentiaries with responsibility for the transfer of power, restoration of the legal order, foreign affairs, defence and national security, finance and economy, national revival, and social affairs. The cabinet was set up, among other things, to formalise and broaden the scope of the Tsikhanouskaya-led office and unite the increasingly divisive opposition. Although the interim government has not received international recognition, its representatives are welcomed and supported by the EU, the U.S., and others. The second important body of the Belarusian opposition is [the Coordination Council](#), established in August 2020 by Tsikhanouskaya to consolidate independent environments and prepare for systemic reforms. In addition, members of the interim government report to the Council. The procedure, which was carried out for the first time, ended on 6 August 2023. The only person who was not approved by the Council and whose mandate was not renewed by Tsikhanouskaya was Alexander Azarov, plenipotentiary for the restoration of the legal order. However, he remained the coordinator of the government's *Peremoha Plan* (Victory), which aims to educate and maintain a reserve of individuals tasked with securing the seizure of power.

Goals and Priorities of the Interim Government. The main objectives of the interim government after taking power are the rehabilitation of those convicted in political trials and the holding of new elections. Both of these are considered by the opposition as the basis for initiating comprehensive changes in the state.

In foreign policy, the priorities of the Tsikhanouskaya government are to make Belarus independent from Russia and to end the support for the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The government has also announced efforts to admit Belarus to the EU and to cooperate extensively with NATO. In June this year, it was announced that democratic changes would be followed by the exit of Belarus from the Union State with Russia and from pro-Russian integration structures such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, and the Commonwealth of Independent States. An independent Belarus will also terminate military agreements concluded with Russia, and Russian troops are to be withdrawn from its territory. Like Tsikhanouskaya, her government is active on the international stage by holding meetings in the EU and its Member States, the UN (which is made possible by other countries), and in countries such as the U.S. The government is actively trying to develop relations with Ukraine. The aim is to seek international recognition for the interim cabinet, to seek permanent sources of funding for the government and independent Belarusian circles, and to point out crimes

committed by the regime. It is also to show the plight of Belarusian political refugees and the consequent need for Western countries to treat the citizens of Belarus and Russia differently, despite the fact that, due to assistance of Russia in the war with Ukraine, Belarus is formally an aggressor state.

In its activities, Tsikhanouskaya's cabinet can count on the support of Poland and the Baltic states. On 20 April this year, in Poland a foundation was registered to support the activities of the interim government.

Attitudes to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. The interim government has condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and consistently supported the defender in the fight against aggression. Establishing official relations with the Ukrainian authorities is also one of its priorities. In August this year, foreign affairs plenipotentiary Valery Kavaleuski was in Kyiv where he met with, among others, Advisor to the Head of the Chancellery of the President of Ukraine Mykhailo Podolyak and agreed to organise joint political and expert events and discuss opportunities for foreign policy cooperation. Members of the interim government also provide Ukraine with information on children kidnapped from the country who have been taken to Belarus or elsewhere, and the creation of sanctions lists covering, for example, Belarusian companies that work for the Russian military.

The interim government also cooperates with the Kalinoŭski Regiment, composed of Belarusians fighting within the Ukrainian armed forces, which recognises Tsikhanouskaya as the legitimate Belarusian leader. This cooperation allows for additional contacts with the Ukrainian authorities.

Reactions of the Belarusian Authorities. The Belarusian authorities see the activities of the interim government as a threat. For this reason, they have accused some members of the cabinet of serious crimes, such as extremism, allegedly committed in the past, and have conducted trials *in absentia*, sentencing many opposition politicians to long prison terms. Confiscation of property has also been ordered for a number of people (including cabinet members). Quite often, the authorities also use harassment against the families of opposition members who have remained in the country. Furthermore, if a convicted person remains abroad and does not return to the country to serve his or her sentence, the authorities will be able to deprive the person of citizenship. This is intended to prevent opposition activists from operating internationally and travelling on Belarusian passports and, in the longer term, also from actively participating in the political life of the country, including standing for election, founding political parties, organisations, or conducting business.

The Belarusian authorities are also tightening control over citizens who have left the country. According to the version

of the law on citizenship amended this year, Belarusian citizens who have the right of residence in other countries will be obliged to report this to the Belarusian authorities. In addition, since 7 September this year, Belarusian diplomatic missions have stopped issuing documents to Belarusian citizens in order to force them to return to the country to obtain new ones.

Conclusions and Recommendations. During its first year in office, the interim government has been actively working on its future policy priorities. For the cabinet to function, however, it is essential that it maintains long-term international support for its ongoing activities, including in the organisation of international visits or assistance in speaking at forums of institutions such as the UN. The importance of such actions will be all the more important as the Belarusian authorities' policy of discrediting the interim cabinet may lead to a growing feeling over time that the opposition remaining abroad has no real understanding of the situation in the country. Susceptibility to the influence of propaganda, including Russian propaganda, will be fostered by the Russification and militarisation of younger people, who are additionally indoctrinated during their education.

In view of the actions of the Belarusian authorities to deprive citizens of Belarus living abroad of the possibility of obtaining documents, it would be worthwhile for the EU countries to recognise the passports that the provisional cabinet plans to issue as equivalent to those issued by the Belarusian state, or to make it easier for Belarusians to obtain travel documents issued by a Member State. On the other hand, in the case of persons without Belarusian citizenship, consideration could be given to developing a common policy on issuing and recognising documents on the model of Nansen passports, which were an international identity document issued during the interwar period to stateless persons and refugees.

The EU and Member States can also become involved in helping the interim government to develop a comprehensive structural reform plan. The experience of countries such as Poland, which have a history of regime transition, will be particularly important here. Western countries may also benefit from the solutions proposed by the interim government in terms of increasing pressure on the regime and applying sanctions.

Poland also has an important role to play in supporting the activities of the interim government. Further financial support for its activities will be necessary, but also support in the international arena and pointing out the need to help independent Belarusian organisations. Furthermore, Poland can increase its support for the institutions of the Belarusian diaspora. It will be particularly important for independent media (such as TV Belsat, which has the widest reach) and organisations promoting Belarusian culture (such as Belarusian House, which has been active for many years).