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**“CONTEMPLATING DIPLOMATIC FRACTURES WHILE
BREAKING THE CYCLE OF SOCIOPOLITICAL INJUSTICE
AND APATHY”**



**Evaluating the Treatment of Migrants and Asylum Seekers at
the Belarus European Union Border**

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Committee: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Issues Committee (Third Committee)

Issue: Evaluating the Treatment of Migrants and Asylum Seekers at the Belarus European Union Border

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Introduction

Immediately after the 2021 elections, the new Belarusian administration took radical decisions regarding its approach and policies towards Europe. Its policies on refugees, in particular, created a major crisis between Europe and Belarus. Belarus's forced redirection of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe led to policy changes in Europe's border countries, a crisis in Belarus, and human rights issues within the European Union.

However, viewing this crisis solely in political, economic, and military terms creates a major problem. Because behind this political crisis, there are not only economic, policy, or military issues, but also humanitarian issues. In fact, people who were forced to migrate from the Middle East and North Africa and whose housing needs were not met continued to suffer because of this political crisis; thousands of refugees lost their lives due to extreme border policies, attitudes towards refugees changed across Europe, and those who managed to find shelter fell into a poor social and psychological state.

As a result, this border crisis has ceased to be a political, economic, and military issue that can be discussed quickly and superficially; it has become a case that requires an assessment of the stance of Western states, primarily the European Union, and the entire world on human rights.

Definition of Key Terms

Migrant: Who moves from one country to another, either temporarily or permanently, for various reasons. Their movement is not always protected under international refugee law.

Asylum Seeker: Who fled their home country or formally applied for international protection in another state due to fear of persecution. They are entitled to certain protections.

Non-Derogable Rights: Fundamental human rights that can't be suspended or limited under any circumstances.



Non-Refoulement: Prohibits states from returning individuals to a country where they face a real risk of persecution. It applies to asylum seekers regardless of whether they have entered a country legally or illegally.

Schengen Area: Group of European countries that have abolished internal border controls, allowing for free movement of people. While internal borders are open, Schengen states share responsibility for protecting the EU's external borders.



Belarus-EU Border: Heavily militarized border between Belarus and Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.

Pushbacks: Practice of forcibly returning migrants or asylum seekers across borders without allowing them to apply for asylum or have their claims individually assessed.

Weaponization of Migration: Deliberate use of population movements by states or political actors to exert pressure.

General Overview

In recent years Belarus began sponsoring an influx of migrants, mostly from

the Middle East and North Africa, to the borders of Lithuania, Poland and Latvia (those states are current members of EU). This act of Belarus is described as “the instrumentalisation of migration for political ends” by the European Commission.

The sudden influx of migrants at the eastern European borders increased pressure on national asylum systems, especially in countries which had not commonly experienced migration. In order to prevent this influx, states like Lithuania, Latvia, Poland deployed additional resources to maintain control at the borders with Belarus and implemented rapid legislative changes relating to the initial stages of the asylum procedure.

UNHCR responded to these measures in written observations, stating that the fundamental right to seek asylum and the non-derogable principle of *non-refoulement* should be observed also in times of emergency. Lithuanians' new policies about asylum seekers was criticised by ECRE as violating the right to seek asylum and the principle of *non-refoulement*. UN Committee Against Torture (UN CAT) expressed concern over serious and unprecedented challenges relating to the lack of information on the asylum procedure in Lithuania. Concerns were raised about access to legal assistance and

interpreters for refugees and asylum seekers, reported incidents of collective expulsions of asylum seekers without reviewing their individual situations, and pushbacks at the border (including of children) with people left in dire conditions with no access to the asylum procedure and basic needs.

2020 Belarusian Presidential Elections and Aftermath

Official results declared that President Alexander Lukashenko is the winner with 81% of the votes, extending his rule that lasted from 1994. However, the election was widely condemned as neither free nor fair. Reports of electoral fraud, the exclusion of arrested or opposition candidates, and the lack of transparent vote counting severely undermined the legitimacy of the outcome in the eyes of the Belarusian nation and international community.

In the aftermath of the election, Belarus experienced the largest protests in the modern history of Europe. Thousands of citizens took the streets in order to demand new elections, reform and end the authoritarian rule of Alexander Lukashenko. The government responded with mass arrest, police violence, and internet shutdowns. These acts of government further deepened Belarus' isolation from Europe.

After the protests, the Belarusian government framed the EU as an external threat interfering in Belarus' sovereignty. So, the regime shifted its policy toward closer alignment with Russia. Cooperation with European institutions was reduced and dialogue on human rights decreased. This new policy of Belarus laid the groundwork for later crises like the border crisis and instrumentalization of migration.

Sudden Influx of Migrants

In mid-2021, the Belarus-EU border became the site of sudden and unexpected influx of migrants, drawing international attention to Europe's eastern frontiers. Crisis have begun with state-linked agencies and travel operators of Belarus began promoting travel packages to Belarus, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. Many migrants and asylum seekers flew into Minsk in order to reach EU member states. Once in Belarus, they were reportedly given information about where and how to cross the external EU border irregularly.

Migrants travelled by air to Belarus and then made their way toward the northern EU borders. From Minsk, groups were guided toward remote sections of the frontier, attempting to enter through forests and fields that are difficult to monitor. This new route filled with asylum seekers hoping to move onward to Western European destinations.

Reports from late 2021 estimated thousands of migrants present at the Belarusian border region. By early 2022, statistics from national guards and independent monitors documented several thousand attempted irregular crossings, particularly along the Poland frontier; in April 2022 alone, nearly 4820 attempts were recorded according to Polish border data. These arrivals sparked responses like construction of border barriers intended to deter irregular migrants.

Response From the EU

In response to the crisis, the EU framed Belarus' actions as the instrumentalisation of migration for political purposes and a form of hybrid attack on the EU's external borders. EU institutions strongly condemned the deliberate encouragement of irregular border crossings and state sponsored smuggling of migrants, linking these practices to the deterioration of EU-Belarus relations after the elections and other aggressive acts.

The EU responded by imposing and expanding targeted sanctions on Belarusian officials and entities involved in facilitating illegal migration and human rights abuses. In late 2021, the European Council adopted a fifth package of restrictive measures that extended sanctions to persons and institutions deemed responsible. The EU also suspended aspects of the visa facilitation agreement with Belarus.

EU member states along the eastern border took substantive measures to reinforce their external frontier. Poland constructed an extensive border barrier and surveillance infrastructure to deter irregular entries, while Lithuania and Latvia strengthened border controls and declared states of emergency in border regions.

Major Parties Involved

Belarus

Belarus is a state that is located between Russia and Eastern Europe. With this important geopolitical location they have an important role as a buffer zone. Also after the 2020 Elections their administration and international relation policies changed in a more anti-European way.

European Union

European Union is a supranational organization that contains 27 member states. They have an important role in human rights, economics, trade relations, and nature acts in international policy. After the Russo-Ukrainian War, the 2021 migrant crisis and various events and the rising right opinions changed their policy about Eastern countries.

Timeline of Key Events

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9 August 2020	Belarusian Presidential Elections
Mid-2021	Influx of Migrants to Europe

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

However there are not any significant attempts to solve the issue about the rights of asylum seekers or migrants, there are some attempts about stopping migrants entering Europe.

Both Latvia, Lithuania and Poland had increased their border controls after the influx of migrants in 2021 in order to prevent migrants from entering European borders.

Possible Solutions

A possible solution to this conflict is opening shelters in the conflict area by international organizations like the UN in order to protect refugees.

Also, economic and political sanctions may be imposed on all parties responsible for this matter.

Another solution is for European Union countries to accept a minimum number of refugees, while Belarus should be subject to a quota for refugees it hosts and allows to migrate to Europe.

Conclusion

As a result, this political conflict and tense environment on the borders of Eastern Europe has caused problems not only in international relations but also in terms of human rights, which must not be violated. Naturally, a solution must be found to this refugee crisis, which also exists in other parts of the world, both for the countries and for the refugees themselves.

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