

<b>Forum:</b>	Security Council (SC)
<b>Issue:</b>	Addressing the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian Border
<b>Student Officer:</b>	Baran Mohammadi
<b>Position:</b>	President

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## PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear All,

My name is Baran Mohammadi, I am 16 years old, and I am a Year 12 student at Byron College – The British International School. It is my utmost honour to be serving as the President of my personal favourite committee, the Security Council, at the 11<sup>th</sup> PSMUN conference, and I am looking forward to meeting and working with all of you. This topic is one which really interests me and is quite saddening as once again the people of the Middle East are being harmed due to Western politics. These people come out of dire situations to the Western world, expecting a better life and better living conditions, yet are faced with brutality, discrimination, and poverty as soon as they arrive. I am excited to observe the debate on this topic as it is a controversial one. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me via email: [baran.m174005@gmail.com](mailto:baran.m174005@gmail.com) . Best of luck on your research!

## TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The victory of Alexander Lukashenko in the 2020 Belarusian Presidential Elections ignited a spark, which would then turn into a wildfire, rapidly deteriorating the political relations of Belarus with the European Union. This, along with many other factors following the election, has led to the crisis along the Polish-Belarusian border, which in short can be described as weaponization of asylum seekers waged against the EU. Lukashenko has currently been in office for 27 years and is currently serving his 6<sup>th</sup> term, making him the longest running president in Europe. In these 27 years, he has been disregarded as the legitimate leader of Belarus by the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the United States, and these countries, along with Lukashenko's opposition, have suspected electoral fraud in the 2020 elections, an accusation which has been made many times throughout Lukashenko's regime.

Since 2015, the European Union has experienced a huge influx in refugees, resulting in a plethora of crises around Europe, but mostly in the Balkans, as they were not equipped for handling such a skyrocketing increase in migrants. According to Pew Research Center, a record breaking 1.3 million asylum seekers entered the EU in

2015<sup>1</sup>. Refugees usually came from countries such as Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, and some central African countries, escaping dire situations of conflict such as the rule of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. As a result of the incursion of asylum seekers, the EU imposed more restrictive laws for migration, and many borders were closed off for refugees to prevent them from further entering Europe. Even though the living conditions for refugees were not adequate in the South-Eastern European countries (which is where most of them entered Europe from), the EU did manage to control the number of migrants entering and leaving.

The Ryanair flight 4978 incident of 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2021 caused a butterfly effect which led to the border crisis. In this incident, a regularly scheduled Ryanair flight from Athens, Greece, to Vilnius, Lithuania, was steered off of its route by the Belarusian Government Air Force to land in Minsk, Belarus, where an opposition journalist named Roman Protasevich, and his girlfriend were arrested and detained by Belarusian police on the grounds of being on the national wanted list for “crimes against the state”. Lukashenko offered no further explanation on the arrest, claiming that what he did was legal. Of course, this was not tolerated by the EU and the United States, both who condemned his actions and planned to impose economic sanctions on Belarus. In retaliation, Lukashenko threatened to flood the EU with drugs and migrants, saying: “We stopped drugs and migrants. Now you will eat them and catch them yourselves.”<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, this was not an empty threat. From July 2021 onwards, Belarus started forming connections with Middle Eastern airlines, and had made the visa process for Middle Easterners entering Belarus extremely easy and accessible. Fraudulent advice for crossing borders in the EU was given out in social media groups suspect of receiving funds from Belarus. Migrants who had arrived at Belarus were allegedly instructed on how to trespass the EU borders by the authorities, and migrants have even claimed that the authorities provided them with wire cutters. At the Poland-Belarus border, however, the situation escalated at a large scale. Migrants who did not make it past the border were forced to stay in Belarus by the authorities, and many of them were assaulted and treated inhumanely by the police. Polish humanitarian aid for the refugees was also blocked by Belarusian authorities. This has resulted in many spurs of violence across the 3 parties. As of the present day, 17 refugees and migrants are either missing or dead and 2 Polish officials have been killed. Poland has described the situation as hybrid warfare and has declared a state of emergency. Middle Eastern airlines including Emirates have barred citizens of Iraq, Syria, and Yemen from entering flights to the EU and Belarus, even with the correct documentation. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>1</sup> “Record 1.3 Million Sought Asylum in Europe in 2015.” *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project*, Pew Research Center, 20 Aug. 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Evans, Joe. “Belarus Dictator Threatens to 'Flood Eu with Drugs and Migrants'.” *The Week UK*, The Week, 28 May 2021, <https://www.theweek.co.uk/news/world-news/europe/952979/belarus-dictator-threatens-flood-eu-with-drugs-migrants-avoid-sanctions>.

situation remains unstable and is in a state of dire urgency, as innocent and vulnerable people are the ones harmed in the end.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### Asylum Seeker

Someone who leaves their own country, often for political reasons or because of war, and who travels to another country hoping that the government will protect them and allow them to live there. The difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee is only a judicial one<sup>3</sup>.

### Electoral fraud

Electoral fraud involves illegal interference with the process of an election, either by increasing the vote share of a favoured candidate, depressing the vote share of rival candidates, or both<sup>4</sup>.

### Sanctions

An action that is taken or an order that is given to force a country to obey international laws<sup>5</sup>. There are three types of sanctions: economic sanctions, in which trade is limited or economic aid is barred for that country; military sanctions, which may be in a form of an arms embargo or military strikes; and diplomatic sanctions, in which diplomatic visits are cancelled and/or limited to indicate dissatisfaction without the involvement of economic or political relations.

### Civil conflict

Violence between many parties within the same area<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> “Asylum Seeker.” *Cambridge Dictionary*, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/asylum-seeker](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/asylum-seeker).

<sup>4</sup> Jones, Douglas W. “Threats to Voting Systems.” *Douglas W. Jones on Threats to Voting Systems*, 7 Oct. 2005, [homepage.divms.uiowa.edu/~jones/voting/nist2005.shtml](http://homepage.divms.uiowa.edu/~jones/voting/nist2005.shtml).

<sup>5</sup> “Sanction Definition & Meaning.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sanction](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sanction).

<sup>6</sup> “Civil Conflict Definition and Meaning: Collins English Dictionary.” *Civil Conflict Definition and Meaning* / *Collins English Dictionary*, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, [www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/civil-conflict](http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/civil-conflict).

### Human trafficking

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery involving the illegal transport of individuals by force or deception for the purpose of labour, sexual exploitation, or activities in which others benefit financially<sup>7</sup>.

### Drug trafficking

Drug trafficking is a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws<sup>8</sup>.

### Hybrid warfare

Hybrid warfare entails an interplay or fusion of conventional as well as unconventional instruments of power and tools of subversion. These instruments or tools are blended in a synchronised manner to exploit the vulnerabilities of an antagonist and achieve synergistic effects<sup>9</sup>. In this case, Belarus is weaponizing migrants against the EU as a form of hybrid warfare.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### The regime of Alexander Lukashenko

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1991, the Belavezha accords were signed by the chairmen of the Supreme Soviets of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, officially dissolving the Soviet Union, however, Belarus did not adopt a national constitution until March of 1994. In this new office, the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus was to be replaced by the President of Belarus, who would function as the country's democratically elected leader. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 1994, after two rounds of election, 39-year-old Alexander Lukashenko was appointed into office after securing 80% of the votes of the public, defeating 5 other candidates. Shortly after his inauguration, he was already proposing ideas of unionisation with Russia to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, which is what gave rise to his opposition.

In 1996, only 2 years into his first term, deputies of the Supreme Council signed a petition to impeach Lukashenko on counts of violating the constitution. Lukashenko then held a referendum on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1996, amending the constitution and addressing these claims. This amendment was passed and the one of the Supreme Council was rejected, but little did they know how much power Lukashenko obtained

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<sup>7</sup> Wooditch, Alese C. and Steverson, Leonard A. "Human trafficking". Encyclopedia Britannica, 22 Jan. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/human-trafficking>. Accessed 10 December 2021.

<sup>8</sup> "Drug Trafficking." *United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime*, [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/index.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/index.html).

<sup>9</sup> Bilal, Arsalan. "Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and 'Trust' as the Antidote." *NATO Review*, *Nato Review*, 30 Nov. 2021, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/11/30/hybrid-warfare-new-threats-complexity-and-trust-as-the-antidote/index.html>.

from this amendment. He was given the right by constitution to dissolve the Supreme Council, which he eventually did, to get rid of opposition. Additionally, his term was extended by two years. These actions were heavily criticised by the USA and the EU.

Lukashenko served his second term from the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, winning 75% of the votes. However, the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) stated that this election “failed to meet international standards”<sup>10</sup>. Around this period, Belarus started developing strong relations with Iran and Iraq. Saddam Hussein was said to have a Belarusian passport, and arms deals between Belarus, Iran and Iraq angered the USA, which, along with its allies, turned more and more against Lukashenko, who in 2014, congratulated Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The USA and EU imposed a travel ban on Lukashenko in 2006 after he held a referendum proposing to eliminate presidential term limits from the constitution, which is why he has already served six terms, and reinstated it in 2011. There was no sign of the removal of the travel ban in 2014.

Under Lukashenko’s regime, which can easily be described as authoritarian, there has been an endless number of cases of political repression. Most recently however, after Lukashenko had been seemingly elected for a sixth term, mass protests broke out in Belarus, rejecting the results of the election in 2020. These protesters faced immense police brutality and were arrested and detained in Okrestino prison. Police were instructed to use lethal force and even kill protesters. However, the events that took place in Okrestino prison were far more sinister. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) announced that its offices had received over 450 cases of torture on the detainees at Okrestino. This included reports of sexual abuse on women and children, which Lukashenko denies, and claims were faked, despite medical records proving otherwise. Nevertheless, Lukashenko did admit to the torture at Okrestino detention centre in an interview with BBC news but claims that the detainees instigated violence and that the police were acting in self-defence.

### EU - Belarus relations

The political relations of the European Union and Belarus have been deteriorating with time. The EU has criticised the Belarusian government on several occasions for its totalitarianism and anti-democratic practices, repeatedly accusing Lukashenko of rigging elections. EU has also constantly condemned actions of Lukashenko, such as the Ryanair hijacking and the police brutality on protesters, saying that Minsk is breaching humanitarian law. Even though the EU had eased its sanctions on the Belarusian leader in 2015, after the 2020 elections, which were also deemed subpar

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<sup>10</sup> “Lukashenko Claims Victory in Belarus Election.” *USA Today*, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 10 Sept. 2001, [usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2001/09/09/belarus.htm](https://www.usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2001/09/09/belarus.htm).

to international standards by the OSCE once again, the Ryanair incident, and the treatment of protesters, the EU threatened to re-impose economic sanctions on Belarus. Currently, the EU easily grants humanitarian visas to Belarusians seeking asylum.

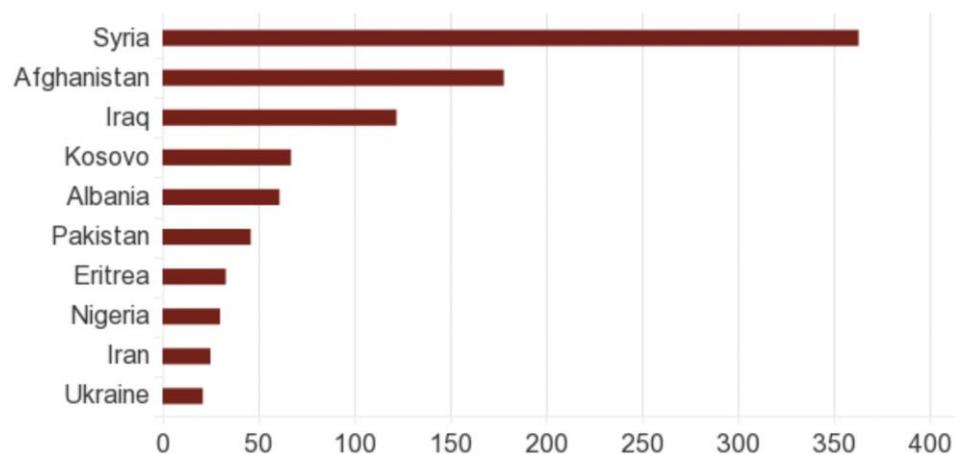
The close relations of Russia and Belarus is a factor which has greatly impacted EU – Belarus relations. Russia and Belarus are unionised, and the nation receives many of its important supplies such as crude oil and dairy products from the Russian Federation. Belarus is also the EU's crude oil pipeline, as the EU also receives oil from Russia, but for it to reach the three EU borders of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, it must pass through Belarus first. During the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Belarus was an active critic of the EU, and strongly opposed the sanctions placed on Russia. Nowadays, the relation is mostly economic between Russia and Belarus, but these relations strongly overshadow the ones of Belarus and the EU.

### Refugee crisis of 2015

2015 saw the largest number of asylum applicants to the EU since World War II, with 1.3 million refugees migrating to the EU. The migration was mostly driven by the outbreak of civil war in Syria, and as a result, most of the asylum applicants were Syrian, however political repression in Iran and Eritrea, conflict and instability in Iraq and Afghanistan, and poverty even in European countries including Kosovo, Albania, and Ukraine, were leading factors in the mass migration to the EU. Nevertheless, only 295,000 of the asylum applications were granted, leaving over half a million people in the EU “illegal” and unable to work, leading to the poverty-driven crisis.

#### Top 10 origins of people applying for asylum in the EU

First-time applications in 2015, in thousands



Source: Eurostat

Source: <sup>11</sup>

There were many different routes for migrants to enter the EU, but the two most common were from Turkey to Greece and from Northern Africa to Italy. Refugees originating from Middle Eastern countries would often use the first route, as Turkey borders many of the countries of interest including Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Since 2012, Turkey's land border to Greece has been closed off by a border fence, making it unapproachable for refugees. Thus, migrants would travel by boat to the Greek islands Lesbos, Samos, Kos, Chios, Rhodes, and Syme, which are closer to the Turkish mainland than they are to the Greek. Nevertheless, they are still entry points to the EU. These migrants were hoping to pass through Greece's mainland to reach Northern Europe, however, in the end of 2015, the EU decided to shut off the borders of Northern Greece to the countries of FYROM, Bulgaria, and Albania, causing a great amount of violence between border authorities and refugees. By the end of 2015, 80% of the migrants were found in Greece<sup>12</sup>, which did not have the resources to facilitate these migrants. Hence, they appealed the situation to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which stated that the infrastructure for the migrants on the islands were completely inadequate.

Smugglers have been proven to play a vast role in the transportation of refugees throughout the EU, since in order to apply for asylum, migrants must be physically present in the EU. In September of 2015, Europol announced that they had detected at least 30,000 migrant smugglers<sup>13</sup>. Many pondered on how the smugglers would benefit from transporting migrants, but it was revealed that they have profited a lot from human trafficking, practically speaking. Smugglers charged migrants between €901 – €1352 for the boat ride lasting 25 minutes from Bodrum, Turkey to Kos Island, Greece<sup>14</sup>. Referring back to the second route of migration, from Northern Africa to Italy, the Mafia Capitale, an anti-Mafia organisation based in Italy which is separate from the state (often because the state has been found to consist of Mafia themselves), soon uncovered that the entrance of African migrants in Sicily was facilitated by the Mafia, who were exploiting the refugees to make profit. More than

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<sup>11</sup> "Migrant Crisis: Migration to Europe Explained in Seven Charts." *BBC News*, BBC, 4 Mar. 2016, [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911).

<sup>12</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Over One Million Sea Arrivals Reach Europe in 2015." *UNHCR*, 2015, [www.unhcr.org/5683d0b56.html](http://www.unhcr.org/5683d0b56.html).

<sup>13</sup> "EU Tracking 65,000 Migrant Smugglers: Europol." *The Citizen*, 9 Oct. 2021, [www.citizen.co.za/news/news-world/news-africa/1879124/europe-migrants-smugglers/](http://www.citizen.co.za/news/news-world/news-africa/1879124/europe-migrants-smugglers/).

<sup>14</sup> Yeginsu, Ceylan, and Anemona Hartocollis. "Amid Perilous Mediterranean Crossings, Migrants Find a Relatively Easy Path to Greece." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 16 Aug. 2015, [www.nytimes.com/2015/08/17/world/europe/turkey-greece-mediterranean-kos-bodrum-migrants-refugees.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/17/world/europe/turkey-greece-mediterranean-kos-bodrum-migrants-refugees.html).

3,000 migrants drowned in 2015 in the Mediterranean Sea, and this was because the smugglers used old, worn-out boats with no maintenance, overfilled the boats, and did not provide any life jackets. Smugglers also operate in the EU mainland as well, transporting migrants from Southern Europe to Northern Europe. The conditions for this transport are also very dire and have resulted in over 1000 deaths. The deadliest incident, however, occurred along the Austro-Hungarian border, where 71 refugees were found dead in a food truck on the outskirts of Vienna. Their cause of death was suffocation, as the food truck was not ventilated. The Hungarian authorities pursued an investigation which led to the arrest and conviction of 13 smugglers charged with murder and homicide.



This image shows Syrian and Afghan refugees paddling towards Lesbos Island, Greece<sup>15</sup>.

In response to the refugee crisis, the EU has added extra restrictions to its immigration laws to limit the number of migrants entering the EU. To obtain an EU visa, migrants from the Middle East must prove financial stability, either by an investment, purchasing property, or depositing a certain amount of money into a European bank account. Even then, there is still a chance of rejection. This successfully lowered the number of migrants entering the EU. Secondly, as the migrants were spread unevenly across Europe, and there was a disproportionate burden of Greece, Italy, and Hungary specifically, the EU imposed a relocation scheme after the idea was passed with a majority vote in the September of 2015. The plan was to relocate 160,000 refugees from Greece and Italy and a further 54,000 from Hungary to other EU countries. Only the UK and Denmark did not participate in this scheme. Nonetheless, the Prime

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<sup>15</sup> Spindler, William. "2015: The Year of Europe's Refugee Crisis." *UNHCR*, 8 Dec. 2015, [www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html](http://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html).

Minister at the time, David Cameron, vowed to accept over 20,000 refugees from Syria over the next five years, however, as of the present day, the UK has only accepted 11,000<sup>16</sup>. This is probably due to the change of Prime Minister and Brexit, which did not do any favours for EU – UK relations. Although the EU’s efforts to control the refugee crisis do not go unrecognised, it must be criticised for not allowing refugees to obtain work permits, which has resulted in many refugees participating in criminal activity to survive, such as drug trafficking. Nevertheless, refugee crime rates in Europe are low, as they only account for 14% of total crime committed in Europe<sup>17</sup>, contrasting to media coverage inflating those numbers.

### The Ryanair Incident and its aftermath

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2021, the Ryanair flight 4978, controlled by Buzz, a Polish subsidiary, was on regular schedule to arrive at Vilnius, Lithuania, departing from Athens, Greece, when it entered Belarusian airspace and was diverted off of its path due to an emergency announcement of a bomb threat that the Belarusian authorities had detected and warned the pilots of. The plane was guided to Minsk National Airport by Belarusian fighter jets. When the plane landed, two passengers were escorted out of the aircraft and arrested by Belarusian authorities; Roman Protasevich, a 26-year-old Belarusian journalist and opposition activist; and his girlfriend, 23-year-old Sofia Sapega, a Russian law student at the European Humanities University in Vilnius. When they found out the flight was landing in Minsk, they begged the pilots for refuge, but were refused so because of Ryanair’s legal agreements. The flight arrived at Vilnius eight and a half hours after its scheduled arrival time, as Belarusian Air Traffic Control (ATC) had to check for explosives.

Athens to Vilnius flight diverted over Belarus



Source: <sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Stickney, Chris. “Population of the UK by Country of Birth and Nationality: Individual Country Data.” *Population of the UK by Country of Birth and Nationality: Individual Country Data* - Office for National Statistics, Office for National Statistics, 25 Nov. 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Papadopoulos, Georgios. “Immigration Status and Property Crime: An Application of Estimators for Underreported Outcomes - IZA Journal of Development and Migration.” *SpringerLink*, Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2 July 2016, [link.springer.com/article/10.1186/2193-9039-3-12](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/2193-9039-3-12).

<sup>18</sup> “Belarus Plane: Ryanair Boss Says Pilot Had No Choice but to Land in Minsk.” *BBC News*, BBC, 15 June 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57480835](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57480835).

The pilots said that they had tried to contact Ryanair but were essentially lied to by Belarusian ATC that they had already reached out to Ryanair but didn't receive a response. The Ryanair CEO Michael O'Leary mentioned that the pilots didn't have a choice but to land. Additionally, three passengers (two of which were Belarusian) disembarked in Minsk even though the destination of the flight was Vilnius, leading many to believe that they were members of the Belarusian KGB and had been trailing Protasevich and Sapega throughout their journey in Greece. The day after the incident, the Belarusian authorities read out an email "signed" by Hamas, which claimed that if the EU does not cease its support for Israel, the Ryanair flight to Vilnius will blow up. German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that this explanation was completely implausible and claimed that this was a premeditated hijacking. Lukashenko went to announce that the email had been sent from Switzerland two days after the incident, however the Swiss authorities did not find any evidence of this. He also said that what he did was perfectly legal. The EU was obviously outraged by the incident and held a meeting the day after, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2021. In this meeting, three decisions were reached: all flights were banned from entering Belarusian airspace, Belarusian carries could not enter EU airspace, and a new set of sanctions was to be imposed on Belarus. The act was denounced by many parties including the EU, NATO, UK, and USA, being deemed as air piracy. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2021, the UK, USA, and EU issued a statement announcing the sanctions they placed on Belarus. These included freezing of assets, travel bans, and the prohibition of exporting EU dual-use goods to Belarus. This is when Lukashenko threatened the EU with a second migrant crisis and an influx in drug trafficking if they didn't lift the sanctions.

### Events of the Polish-Belarusian border crisis

In Early August, Belarusian travel agencies began collaborating with travel agencies in the Middle East, advertising reduced prices and pathways to the EU. It is believed that these travel agencies were state-run, especially considering the fact that around this time, Belarusian visa restrictions to the Middle East were becoming much looser, and Middle Eastern passport holders could issue a Belarusian visa on arrival. Only certain agencies were allowed to do this and were accompanied by the authorities. Airlines such as Iraqi Airways and Cham Wings Airlines of Syria were increasing the frequency of flights to Minsk, and Belarusian airline Belavia had offers available for Middle Eastern travellers. Upon arrival in Minsk, migrants were escorted to hostels by the "travel agents". They would express their wishes to enter the EU, in which the authorities would advise them on how to do so. Witnesses have seen Belarusian military trucks drop migrants off on the border, and migrants have confirmed that they were provided with wire cutters by the authorities. Iraqi migrants were interviewed,

and they stated that they were informed by the Belarusian authorities that entering the EU by this method was legal.

On August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Polish border guards reported 133 illegal border crossings in a span of two days and considering that there were only 122 illegal border crossings in the whole of 2020, this worried the Polish authorities. On August 9<sup>th</sup>, another 349 crossings were reported to happen in the span of two days. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of August, the Polish government had decided to deploy the Polish Armed Forces (PAF) in the area. By September of 2021, the Polish authorities estimated around 10,000 migrants waiting at the border, wanting to pass through. This is when Poland declared a state of emergency and urged the EU to provide assistance. This state of emergency meant that no human rights activists, doctors unaffiliated with the PAF, and journalists were forbidden from coming closer than 3km to the border, leaving the migrants in dire states. On October 8<sup>th</sup>, a video was published by the Polish border guard showing Belarusian soldiers helping migrants cross the border, either by cutting the wires or destroying them with logs.

Nevertheless, physical conflict between the migrants and the Polish border guards did not start until the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, where between 60-70 migrants clashed with Polish border guards in a village in Poland, near the border. In this clash, two Polish guards and an unidentified number of migrants were injured. This is when other countries, such as the UK, and the EU began to intervene. This incident also pushed the Polish government to plea for a border wall to the EU. This proposition was denied but later on the EU mentioned that it would provide Poland with border infrastructure. The violence did not end there, however. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of November, several hundred migrants attempted to essentially stampede into Poland, using rocks to distance the Polish border guards from them and barging towards them in a synchronised manner. The Polish guards had expected this to happen, so they had protective shields and teargas thrown at the migrants. This standoff made the government close the border at that area.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, the same incident occurred, with hundreds of migrants attempting to break through the borders, only this time they were met with water cannons and stun grenades from the Polish side. Poland considered closing off the entire border with Belarus. On October 14<sup>th</sup>, Poland passed a law allowing border guards to turn away migrants. This is illegal under international law. Although the actions of the Polish authorities were condemned by many human rights groups, the brutality that the Belarusian authorities inflicted on the migrants was equally as inhumane. Migrants who had realised that they were deceived and who tried to return to Minsk were beaten viciously by the soldiers. Neither side offered adequate food, water, or shelter to the migrants, and the temperate was starting to become colder and colder. As of the present day, 21 migrants are known to be dead, either from the terrible conditions they were living in, or from the brutality they faced from the soldiers.

## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

### Belarus

Belarus is mostly responsible for the spike of illegal border crossings in the EU by marketing travel schemes in the Middle East, as well as the mistreatment and deception of migrants from the Middle East. It shares a border with three EU countries: Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, and the authorities have pushed migrants to these borders, even providing wire cutters. The country itself has no infrastructure to facilitate these migrants, so as the EU border guards block their way to enter the EU, they are stuck in Belarus, which is currently under (unofficially) an authoritarian dictatorship. Nevertheless, the migrants are treated just as terribly under Belarusian authority.

### Poland

Poland has described the actions of Belarus as “hybrid warfare” and has since doubled the number of border guards in the Polish-Belarusian border region. Poland has condemned the authoritarian regime in Belarus many times in the past and has even granted humanitarian visas to many political refugees from Belarus, such as Olympic athlete Krystsina Tsimanouskaya. On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, Poland announced a state of emergency at the border, in which it limited the freedom of assembly and movement at the border and barred human rights activists, doctors not associated with the border patrol, and journalists from entering and reporting from the area. This action received a lot of criticism by human rights organisations, accusing Poland of trying to conceal how the guards were treating the migrants. Poland has suggested the construction of a border wall and has funded Lithuania so that they can construct one there as well.

### Iraq

The travel scheme to Belarus was mostly advertised in Iraq to Iraqi people, especially in Kurdistan, so a majority of the migrants were from there. In general, Iraq had good relations with Belarus until the Polish-Belarusian border crisis, where they eventually cancelled all direct flights to Belarus on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 2021, after the pleas of the EU and the USA. The Iraqi government also closed down two consulates of Belarus located in Baghdad and Erbil three months later as part of the goal of stopping illegal migration to the EU via Belarus. The government even planned rescue flights of all migrants, whether they were Iraqi or not, from the border to Iraq in November. Only one out of the two flights originally planned took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2021, where 430 migrants who agreed to return to Iraq were removed from the border. This proves how disastrous the conditions were at the border if the people seeking asylum are agreeing to go back to the country they wanted to escape.

## United Kingdom

The UK has played a large role in the imposition of sanctions against Belarus, as well as providing as much support as it can for Poland. For example, in November 2021, the UK deployed 10 soldiers from the Corps of Royal Engineers, a corps of the British army specialised in military engineering, to support the Polish border guards, and by the end of the month, 150 members of the Royal Engineers were stationed at the border. On 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021, the UK's Ministry of Defence announced that the UK would deploy a further 140 engineers to provide Poland with support at the border. Apart from its support for Poland, the UK has also strongly condemned the actions of the Belarusian government, stating that it's a blatant attempt at weakening the Eastern EU borders and instrumentalising migrants for political gain.

## Russian Federation

Although Russia angrily denies any claims of supporting Belarus in pushing migrants into the EU, many countries, and organisations, including the EU itself, have suspected Russian involvement. An exemplification of this is the conduction of snap drills by Russia along the Polish-Belarusian border in show of its support to its ally, Belarus. When Alexander Lukashenko threatened to cut off the Russia-EU oil pipeline, which passes through Belarus, Russia did not speak on it. This silence can be portrayed in many ways – either the Russian government agrees with this threat, or it does not perceive it as a serious threat. Regardless, the Russian government has been critical of the West's response to the crisis, accusing the EU of being hypocritical as they use water cannons to deter refugees from the border. Furthermore, Russia has expressed its wishes for the West to recognise Lukashenko as a legitimate leader and ease its sanctions on Belarus.

## European Union

The EU is the biggest actor in the sanctions imposed on Belarus. Since Lukashenko's victory at the 2020 presidential election in Belarus, the EU's relations with Belarus have been strained, as the EU still does not recognise him as Belarus' leader, and have only deteriorated further following the Ryanair incident, which pushed the EU to enact economic sanctions against Belarus in the first place. Frontex, which is the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and a subsidiary of the EU, is based in Warsaw, Poland, and has provided support for Polish border guards in preventing the migrants from passing through into the EU. However, despite the EU's strong condemnations against Belarus, it currently does not have the strongest relations with Poland either, mostly because the EU has accused Poland of breaking European and Polish constitutional law. Primarily, the EU rejected the Polish request to construct a border wall, and then came to a compromise, stating that Poland would be provided with border infrastructure. The EU has urged Poland to allow the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Médecins Sans Frontières to help out migrants at the border.

## Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe

The OSCE is an intergovernmental organisation which includes the insurance of fair elections and protection of human rights in its mandate. The OSCE has constantly called out the Belarusian government for electoral fraud, as every single presidential election in Belarus has been deemed as a failure to meet international standards. It has also voiced its concern about the human rights abuses in the 2020 mass protests in Belarus after the election and at the Polish-Belarusian border. It emphasised on how the European Court on Human Rights' request for Poland to provide the migrants with food, water, temporary shelter, and adequate healthcare is not being fulfilled, as migrants are falling ill and dying due to the cold and malnutrition.

## United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The UNHCR is focused on protecting the migrants at the border while trying to reduce the conflict and violence occurring there. It calls for immediate de-escalation of tensions at the border as well as requesting permission to provide emergency aid to the migrants despite Poland's state of emergency. Both Belarus and Poland denied UN access to the border on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2021, an action which was condemned by the UN. Nonetheless, the UNHCR has played a huge role in the publication of the Polish-Belarusian border events in order to inform the public and the governments to devise a new plan of action.

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date of Event	Description of event
July 10, 1994	Alexander Lukashenko is elected as Belarus' first President.
December 8, 1999	Union State of Russia and Belarus formed.
October 17, 2004	Referendum supports the change in constitution, removing the limit of two terms for a President. OSCE once again announces that the vote does not meet international standards.
January 27, 2006	The EU imposes a travel ban on Lukashenko due to dishonesty in elections.
October 29, 2015	The travel ban is removed. EU – Belarus relations seem to be ameliorating.
December 3, 2015	The EU declares a refugee crisis after receiving 1.3 million asylum applications.
August 9, 2020	Mass protests break out as Alexander Lukashenko officially wins election by 80% majority. The USA and EU express their disapproval, claiming that the elections were rigged. Multiple human rights abuses occur in the protests by the authorities.
May 23, 2021	Ryanair flight 4978 is diverted from its original route from Athens to Vilnius. It lands in Minsk, where two passengers who

	were considered as opposition to the government were arrested with no solid reason or charge.
June 4, 2021	The EU, USA and UK impose sanctions on Belarus following the Ryanair incident. Lukashenko responds by threatening a second refugee crisis in the EU.
August 6, 2021	Poland reports a spike in illegal immigrants crossing the border, with 133 illegal border crosses in a span of two days. Poland accuses Belarus of “hybrid warfare”.
September 2, 2021	Poland, on behalf of the EU, announces a state of emergency at the border.
December 2, 2021	The EU, USA and UK impose a fifth package of sanctions on Belarus after 2 Polish border guards were heavily injured in the conflict at the border.

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

### Sanctions

The sanctions imposed on Belarus are primarily economic and are restrictive measures. These sanctions include blocking properties, most recently three aircraft, and designating a set number of individuals and entities (EU: 95 individuals, 19 entities. USA: 20 individuals, 12 entities). Alexander Lukashenko and his son Viktor Lukashenko, along with high-ranking officials and people who have contributed to the wide spreading of propaganda are included amongst these individuals. The US has also promulgated restrictions for dealing with Belarus. A member of the Atlantic Council mentioned that it is not expected for Lukashenko to change course with the sanctions, but their purpose is rather to limit his activity and the government’s ability to act financially. Even though these sanctions do put Belarus under pressure to resolve the crisis, they do not directly tackle the issue at hand. They may reduce the amount of spending possible on the military and police, however, migrants still remain at the border and are unable to return to Minsk or enter the EU. It cannot be denied that they are necessary to express international disapproval and limit government activity, but various courses of action should be taken alongside sanctions.

### EU communication with airlines and governments

The EU has streamlined communication with many different governments and entities to limit as many people entering Belarus or the EU as possible, especially in the Middle East. For example, Emirates Airlines have declared that they will not sell any tickets to the EU or neighbouring countries (Belarus included) to Iraqi, Syrian, and Yemeni passport holders. This may sound like an extreme measure but in reality, many asylum seekers are deterred from entering Belarus, where the conditions are even worse than their home countries. Additionally, Turkey, Ukraine, Iraq, and the UAE have all stopped direct flights to Belarus. This makes the entry to Belarus very improbable as Belarus is

surrounded by EU countries, and there is no sea for people to cross from. The only possible way for refugees to enter Belarus at this point in time is through Russia, which is why it is being accused of lending a helping hand to Belarus in transporting migrants to EU borders.

### UN involvement

The aid provided by the UN is mostly humanitarian. The UN's main concern is the safety of the migrants as the temperature gets cooler and cooler along the border, foreshadowing the sub-zero climate at the border in a few weeks. As of the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2021, 21 migrants have gone missing and have been assumed dead. The UN human rights chief described the situation as “appalling from both sides” and urged for Poland and Belarus to permit entry of UN officials at the border. As of present, the UN is ready to provide humanitarian assistance at both sides of the border when granted access. What is really concerning about the UN involvement is that there has been no actual involvement; the UN has only issues statements on the matter and provided the platform countries to issue statements at the UN Security Council.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

### New Asylum Mechanism

However much the EU tries to stop migration, it does not change the fact that there are over 3000 people seeking asylum at the border. The EU must remember that by European law, established at the European Convention on Human Rights, states that anyone seeking protection, regardless of if they have entered the country legally or not, has the right to be introduced to the asylum application process. The EU must negotiate with Poland to implement an asylum mechanism specific to the Polish-Belarusian border which allows for the migrants to enter the EU to start their application process and to exit the volatile environment of Belarus. Most of the migrants have stated that they do not intend to stay in Poland, but to move to other European countries. The asylum mechanism must take into consideration migration around Europe and the equal distribution of asylum seekers, as Poland is currently not stable enough for an influx of migrants.

### Allowing aid to approach the borders

Currently, the UN and NGOs have been prohibited access to the border. Not only is Belarus very adamantly of the offensive side, but Poland has taken a strong defensive stance. In reality, Poland deems the humanitarian crisis at the border as an invasion, however, this approach has resulted in nothing but violence and death. Thus, UN officers and NGOs should be allowed to enter the area for multiple purposes. Firstly, they must record any signs of brutality from both Polish and Belarusian authorities

and should prevent it. Secondly, they must provide the migrants with basic necessities such as food, water, healthcare, and shelter. Thirdly, they must negotiate with border guards on rights to asylum and the protection of migrants. The UN must also provide a platform for negotiation not only with the migrants and the guards, but between the guards themselves.

### EU stance

Alexander Lukashenko has stated himself that he will not stop until the sanctions are lifted, and he is recognised as the legitimate leader of Belarus by the EU. Nonetheless, this should not waver the EU's stance. The EU may hold talks negotiating with Belarus and Russia, including factors such as the detainment of Roman Protasevich, but the EU must emphasise on the fact that their relations with Belarus can only go forward if Belarus ceases to weaponize migrants. The EU must also urge airlines to increase security on flights to Russia from the Middle East, as it would not be possible to suspend all flights to Russia.

### Drugs

To prevent the entrance of drugs in the EU, Poland must be facilitated with stronger security to inspect for illegal drugs and dispose of them. The border guards must undergo training on how to investigate and detect drugs and how to conduct risk analysis, with the help of UN officials. They must also be provided with the necessary equipment and surroundings when searching the migrants. In Poland, this operation must be coordinated with Europol.

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