

Lithuanian Government Impoverishes Its Own Citizens As a Means to Topple Belarus President Lukashenko

Pressure Belarus on behalf of NATO and the European Union.

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Since the re-election of Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko on August 9, deemed a rigged election by the West, protests have persisted for nearly three months. Led by opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the protests do not only continue to persist, but neighboring countries are actively intervening in the domestic affairs of Belarus in the hope that Lukashenko will be toppled, and thus, in their view, weaken Russian influence.

Just days after the election, a faction of the Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats in the Seimas, the unicameral parliament of Lithuania, called for the immediate announcement of Lithuanian sanctions against 39 of the most influential representatives of the “Alexander Lukashenko regime,” as they termed it.

“Lithuania must clearly, quickly and unambiguously formulate and consolidate strategic provisions for the Belarussian regime at the European Union and transatlantic level, be an icebreaker in the fight for freedom and against tyranny. Sanctions must also send a signal to other influential members of the regime that continue to support Lukashenko, will mean a stalemate and further sanctions against a wider range of the current elite,” said leader of the Seimas opposition, Gabrielius Landsbergis.

With full backing from the opposition, decision makers in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius achieved complete unanimity to pressure Belarus on behalf of NATO and the European Union. Taking on the so-called responsibility of dealing with the situation in Belarus, Lithuania developed a plan to challenge the legitimacy of Lukashenko by providing visas, housing and financial support to opposition figures; promoting Belarussian activists in Lithuanian universities, including awarding educational scholarships at the expense of the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science and Sports; simplified employment in the Lithuanian labor market; and, free medical services.

In addition, separate assistance is also provided to the Belarussian opposition in the form of a €200,000 grant to the Belarussian European Humanitarian University, a private liberal arts university founded in Minsk in 1992 shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union. It has however been operating in exile in Vilnius since 2004 after being shut down for “unsuitable classes,” but more likely for aggressively promoting liberal ideology.

While Vilnius may be proud of its role in the Belarussian conflict, Lithuanians are beginning to realize the economic consequences of such assistance, especially since a Ukraine-style color revolution was averted and Lukashenko’s position is consolidated and secure. Despite the

fact that Vilnius annually receives visible support from the European Union, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda and his government ineffectively allocates resources received towards anti-Lukashenko activities.

Social protection spending in Lithuania is among the lowest in the Europe Union while the [poverty rate](#) is among the highest. Lithuanian citizens do not have enough employment opportunities, which is why they seek for it in Western Europe. Many educated Lithuanians travel abroad for work opportunities but often end up doing mundane work, irrespective of their university qualifications. In the United Kingdom it is common to find Lithuanians doing construction, nannying or maid work. According to a statement by representatives of the Ministry of Social Security and Labor, the situation with unemployment in Lithuania is absolutely critical.

Belarusian migrant workers to the Baltic country are just worsening the situation, especially since 2,360 labor permits were issued since the beginning of the year, a significant amount considering Lithuania's population is only about 2.7 million. This would be especially frustrating for Lithuanians considering [unemployment in Belarus](#) was 4.6% in 2019, lower than Lithuania's 6.35%. Belarus is also capable of consistent GDP growth without having to rely on remittances unlike Lithuania which is experiencing a population decline due to immigration to the West because of the lack of employment opportunities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not been any kinder to Lithuania's prospects as a negative trend continues in almost all sectors of the economy, including wholesale trade and retail business, transportation, food services, industrial output, the scientific and technical service sector, construction and tourism.

Vilnius' priority in favor of the Belarusian opposition instead of Lithuanian citizens has seen a degradation of living quality. In fact, crime is beginning to explode in Lithuania, partially because of the lack of opportunities. In all of the EU, Lithuania had the second highest number of intentional homicides [in 2017](#). It was only behind Latvia and recorded 4 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. It can only be assumed until the next release of official statistics that crime in Lithuania has only become worse as a result of the downturn in the economy because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Primary care and public health measures in Lithuania are underfunded but there is no shortage for the defense sector, whose funding is steadily growing. While Lithuania spends 2.02% of their GDP on defense, parliamentary parties [signed an agreement](#) pledging to increase the country's defense spending to 2.5% of the GDP by 2030. An increasing military budget and prioritized funding for the Belarusian opposition will only see more Lithuanians become dissatisfied with the domestic situation.

Lithuania claims its bloated military budget is part of their NATO responsibilities and is a deterrence against Russia. Although Lithuania cannot match Russia militarily, the justification of stalling the Russians long enough so that NATO can intervene in a hypothetical war is being actively used. Of course, Russia has no ambitions of conquering the Baltic States as they would try to have us believe, but this permanent paranoia cannot be shaken off. This paranoia and servitude to Atlantic-Euro interests drives Vilnius' anti-Lukashenko policies.

Whereas Lukashenko is believed to be a Russian puppet, he was actually far more dynamic

as he attempted to balance Moscow and the West. In fact, Lukashenko often prioritized relations with the West over Moscow. However, given Belarus' recent negative experience with the West, largely spearheaded by Lithuania, it has only forced Lukashenko to return to Russia's sphere of influence. Effectively, rather than pressuring Lukashenko into capitulation, Lithuania has only driven him back to Moscow, thus weakening their own geopolitical positioning and failed to strengthen. While Lukashenko is secure in Minsk, Lithuanian citizens are increasingly impoverished as their government does everything it can to topple the Belarusian leader.

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