

Migration Crisis in Europe Is Real and Demonizing Belarus Will Not Solve It

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The migration crisis in the Belarusian-Polish border has become a hot topic in Europe. Last week a group of about 400 people was flown from Belarus back to Iraq in a repatriation flight. Belarus’ authorities have in fact been working with both the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on this issue. On Monday, a group of 118 people left the country from Minsk’s national airport heading back to unspecified countries and Belarus’ President Alexander Lukashenko announced more repatriation flights are being prepared – while Alexey Begun, head of the migration department within the Belarussian Interior Ministry, has stated migrants who wish to go back home are being “assisted”. These are signs of de-escalation amid the crisis. However, the European Union (EU) insists on employing aggressive rhetoric against Minsk.

Lukashenko, in his turn, has criticized the bloc for refusing to hold talks on the topic of migration. Whether one likes Lukashenko or not, he clearly has a point there, in the sense that there are deeper issues at stake, namely, the social and economic causes behind the great influxes of migration headed to Western Europe’s countries. This phenomenon pertains to mostly war-torn countries, such as Syria and others in the Middle East. It is a well-known fact that European powers such as France have been directly funding rebel groups in Syria since [2012](#) and also delivering them weapons. The 2013 [EU decision to put an end to the arms embargo on the Syrian opposition](#) paved the way for enhancing and legitimizing the European arming of terrorists in Syria. More generally, Western military operations in the Middle East are a root cause for major instability in the region – which creates a great part of the migration flux.

From the beginning of this crisis the EU has accused Minsk of orchestrating the migration crisis in a kind of hybrid warfare in retaliation for European sanctions – a charge Belarus denies. The truth is that there is a migration crisis in Eastern Europe affecting the Baltics and there is a so-called Belarussian route. This is not so different from what has been taking place for many years in [Mediterranean countries](#) (oftentimes Southern Europe is [disadvantaged](#) within the bloc).

The three EU countries that share a border with Belarus – Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia – have been increasing border patrol and there are talks about building a wall. In the dynamics of these migration waves, these countries are basically entry points for the European Union – many of the migrants have no preference regarding any European country, they just wish to enter the EU.

Already in August this year it was widely reported that the Lithuanian migration crisis had apparently reached a new phase, with a halt in the influx. An AP piece quoted 22-year old Iraqi man Tamar Heidar as saying: “Belarus not using me, I don’t care about Belarus. All these people here, they are doing this to get a better life. It’s not because Belarus is using me. I’m using Belarus.”

While Lukashenko is being accused of weaponizing migration (and he certainly has an interest in [getting concessions from the EU](#)), what is not getting much attention is how Poland itself is exploiting the crisis amid the narratives’ war. One should keep in mind that the Polish authorities in Warsaw are under a lot of pressure due to supposed EU rule of law violations and thus it is in their interests to use the current crisis as a means to get support from the EU, which is precisely what is happening. Last Sunday, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki warned that the border crisis could be a prelude to “something much worse”, mentioning Russian military presence in Belarus. He was obviously referring to what he believes to constitute a risk of armed conflict with Minsk. Even after Minsk’s latest efforts to de-escalate tensions, Morawiecki stated – during his tour to Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia – that the crisis is “far from over.”. It is also ironic that Warsaw, so far one of the greatest opponents of any EU common asylum system, is now demanding the EU fund of a Polish border wall.

Even though there is such a thing as the Common European Asylum System (in theory at least), in practice, European leaders can’t seem to agree on just how to implement it. Recently, Sophie in ‘t Veld, a Dutch member of the European Parliament has stated: “We continue to scramble from one refugee crisis to the other, blaming other countries for our problems and denouncing reality. Instead, EU nations need to start implementing the common asylum policy in a unified manner”.

Every time the number of migrants and particularly refugees escalate, the issue becomes a hot topic in Brussels again. While Lukashenko might exploit the situation for its own benefit, this time Belarus is indeed a very convenient scapegoat – and even Moscow is thusly blamed for not “controlling” Minsk, as if the latter were its puppet state, which [it clearly is not](#): Putin and Lukashenko have already clashed on a number of serious issues a number of times.

Every country, including Belarus, has the right to maintain its own migration and border policies and to safeguard its sovereignty. However, if Poland and other European countries refuse to take some groups of migrants, it is not reasonable to assume that only Minsk bears responsibility for them. The fact that the EU does not recognize Lukashenko as a legitimate President does not help much. For years, Belarus has really been a kind of obstacle in both migrants and narcotic flows to Western Europe, as Lukashenko himself famously stated. To sum it up, one cannot politically isolate and demonize a state and its leaders and then demand that the same state cooperates on border issues. Minsk itself has been the target of a continuous [Western campaign](#) and hybrid warfare, including from its neighbors, such as [Lithuania](#).

Be it as it may, we are talking about a serious humanitarian problem, involving a lot of misery and suffering, that needs to be addressed. The reality of the so-called Belarussian route and of the general migration crisis must be acknowledged, as well as its root causes. Pragmatic joint actions pertaining to the issue of this particular migration route should be discussed and Belarus must be part of this talk. But this cannot be undertaken amid violent rhetoric and amid an exchange of accusations.

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