

7th BELARUS REALITY CHECK

June 21, 2017

*Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania,
Gedimino ave. 51, Vilnius, Lithuania*

PROGRAMME

The Eastern Partnership Reality Check is a policy review process aiming to gather insights from top domestic and international analysts, practitioners, diplomats and policy-makers covering Eastern Partnership countries in order to discuss these countries' realities behind closed doors. It has the ambition to satisfy demand for a more in-depth policy in this area. Under the aegis of Lithuania's EU Presidency (July-December 2013) the first such review was the Belarus Reality Check enacted in Vilnius, Lithuania October 2012.

The 7th Belarus Reality Check with the help of top Belarusian and international experts and practitioners will provide evidence-based analysis and a balanced policy advice. The event is organized by the Eastern Europe Studies Centre with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, USAID via Pact and Forum Syd, together with programmatic contributions from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Speakers are asked for short inputs but active participation is expected from all invited participants. The meeting will result in a non-paper that will be fact-checked and peer-reviewed before being widely distributed. The Reality Check and all of its related activities are held under the Chatham House Rule.

09.00 – 09.45 Registration & Welcome Coffee

09.45 – 10.00 **Opening and Welcome Remarks**

Darius Skusevičius, Vice Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania
Balázs Jarábik, Nonresident Scholar, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Dovilė Šukytė, Policy Analyst, Eastern Europe Studies Centre

Supporters:



Implementer:



10.00 - 11.30 **Belarus' Politics: Stable Instability**

Belarus received international attention after Minsk crack down after weeks of modest yet steady protests that were connected to the so-called parasite tax. The government's evident miscalculations with the policy and return to repressions did not offset Minsk's internal status quo nor its relations with Russia and the West. Even though there are still a large number of people in jail, sanctions relief was continued by the West, while Moscow provided yet another bail out for the cash strapped Belarusian government.

Topics to cover:

Belarus's Internal Politics: post protest politics - balancing between preserving internal stability, maintaining dialogue with the West, and ensuring Russia's support to the possible extent.

Opposition update and making sense of White Legion

Russia's actual influence and fresh bail out

Siloviki and reformers: actual relations and trends

11.30 – 12.00 Coffee Break

12.00 – 13.30 **Economy: Is there a light in the end of the tunnel?**

Based on the latest numbers, Belarus seems out of the recession; , however, its growth prospects are modest at best and there is a question of whether it will be enough to balance the growing dissatisfactions among its citizens. With the most recent bail out from Russia, Minsk is out of imminent danger of default, but the relations in key sectors with Russia is far from satisfactory. Does Minsk have the capacity to match the ambition to reach out and find other trade partners? Can Minsk help to ease the relations between Ukraine and Russia or is it in a position to profit from the conflict?

Topics to cover:

Economic update: growth and trade prospects

What the Russian bail out means for the economy? Current aspects and trends of Belarus-Russia relations (oil & gas, trade, Eurasian Economic Union).

Belarus – Ukraine: trade, security, political relations

IMF talks: update

China's One Road, One Belt's policy potential for Belarus

Supporters:



Implementer:



13.30 – 14.30 Lunch

14.30 – 16.00 Belarus and Regional Security

Since the Ukraine crisis, Belarus and the Baltic states are on the fence. The words of Lithuania's president that the mere existence of Russia and Belarus is a threat to the Baltic region underlines the emotions lingering around in the region. The upcoming joint Russian-Belarusian "Zapad 2017" military exercise is a case in point, raising speculations for some period of time. The panel is expected to put Zapad in 2017 into a context and debate the various points of view on Belarus's actual policies towards regional security and compare that with the views from the region.

Topics to cover:

Zapad 2017: update and context

Militarization of the region: Suwalki gap and the Kaliningrad enclave

Belarus-Russia military cooperation: facts and trends (Belarus and Russia viewpoints)

Belarus and Ukraine relations particularly when it comes to mitigating risk from Russia (Belarus and Ukraine viewpoints)

Belarus's situational neutrality and military adaptation (interoperability) to the new regional security environment

16.15 – 16.30 Closing Remarks

Supporters:



Implementer:

