

# Baltics imposed sanctions on themselves

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Sanctions are used as a tool of foreign policy by many governments. This month such restrictions were imposed on Belarus in order to force Belarus leader Aleksandr Lukashenko to leave office. Political and economic situation in this country has been remaining complex for about two months since the Presidential elections in August.

The U.S. and EU leaders say they do not recognize Belarus' election result though the vote was not monitored by OSCE PA or any other international observers.

It should be said that OSCE PA President George Tsereteli and Secretary General Roberto Montella discussed the upcoming election with Head of the Belarusian OSCE PA Delegation Andrei Savinykh in an informal online meeting on 26 June.

OSCE PA leaders informed the Belarusian side that the PA had decided that it would not observe any elections until the autumn, at the earliest, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Probably, this decision was a big mistake and OSCE now has no real proof of violating voters' rights in Belarus.

In spite of this, the EU rejected the official results of the August 9 presidential election which credited Lukashenko and tries to force him to leave. For this purpose EU agrees sanctions on 40 officials during an EU Council summit on Oct. 1, 2020.

The more so, Lithuania placed 118 people in Belarus, including president, on its own sanctions list.

As we know, sanctions are usually applied by one or more countries against a targeted state. They may be imposed for a

variety of political, military, and social issues. So, the EU has made a decision to use this tool to influence Belarus.

The matter is, in the history of modern statecraft, economic and other sanctions have been employed countless times, almost always “unsuccessfully” if success is measured in terms of the economic impact such actions often act against those who impose them instead against their intended target.

Thus, Belarus in its turn announced sanctions against the European Union on October 2 in retaliation to restrictive measures agreed by European leaders.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry’s statement accused the EU of “striving towards the deterioration of relations with us” and imposed its own set of sanctions against the bloc.

Earlier Belarus president threatened to re-route import and export cargo through Russian ports after Lithuania and its neighbours Estonia and Latvia last month imposed sanctions against him.

Situated in the geographic heart of Europe, Belarus is criss-crossed by major international transit corridors that connect the European Union, Russia, Central Asia and China, as well as link the Baltic, Black and Caspian seas. The closure of those transit routes through the country or their redirection to Russian ports will affect many regions. And the geo-economic and geopolitical impact of such a policy will extend well beyond Belarusian-Lithuanian relations.

So, the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda now faces economic fallout from the Baltic state’s hard line against President Alexander Lukashenko.

Klaipeda is the largest port in the Baltic states and handles more than 45 million tonnes of goods a year – more than quarter of it from and to Belarus via Lithuanian rail.

“Belarusian cargo is very important for the port of Klaipeda,” Algis Latakas, director general of the port, told AFP.

Andrius Romanovskis, president of Lithuania’s business confederation, said companies operating in Klaipeda were “very sensitive and are closely following” the latest news from Belarus. By closing transit to Klaipeda, Belarus will certainly harm Lithuania.

“For some companies, it would mean quite a strong negative economic effect,” he said.

Lithuanian government interfering in the Belarus internal affairs merely transfers the cost of a foreign policy decision to Lithuanian industrial sector and entrepreneurs.

Since foreign policy decisions are at least arguably for the good of the entire country, the cost of paying for them should be borne by the politicians and not by any entrepreneurs or particular group of people who were not lucky to have business ties with neighbouring Belarus. Belarus blacklisted officials do not suffer very much from imposed sanctions while Lithuanians entrepreneurs and Lithuanian economy will lose real money.

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