

Migration between Belarus and Poland: Current Trends and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

This brief paper looks into four important aspects of mobility between Belarus and Poland. These are short-term travel for non-employment matters, temporary labour migration, long-term travel arrangements including the Polish Cards, and the present state of art with a bilateral local border traffic regime. Short-term mobility between Belarus and Poland remains hampered by the absence of a visa facilitation agreement between the EU and Belarus. However, in the last years Belarus, while continuously blocking the local border traffic agreements with Poland and Lithuania, unilaterally introduced a number of options allowing EU citizens to visit Belarus visa-free.

The number of Belarusian temporary labourers admitted to Poland has increased substantially in the past years due to economic downturn in Belarus, recession in Russia and liberalization of access to its labour market by Poland. The number of registered statements for Belarus' nationals by Polish employers under the simplified work scheme in January-June 2017 (24,216) more than four times exceeded the number of registered statements for Belarusian in the whole year of 2015 (5,599). Furthermore, growing numbers of Polish Cards issued in Belarus and widening disparity in economic performance between the two countries lead to permanent outmigration of Belarus' nationals to Poland.

1. Developments in short-term travel between Belarus and Poland.

1. In November 2013 - March 2014 the Delphi survey on migration trends between Belarus and the EU was carried out by the author among sixteen migration experts representing academic institutions, NGOs, governmental bodies and international organizations based in Belarus. See: Andrei Yeliseyeu, 'Migration between the EU, V4 and Eastern Europe: The present situation and the possible future. The perspective of Belarus', in *Forecasting migration between the EU, V4 and Eastern Europe. Impact of visa abolition*, ed. by Marta Jaroszewicz, Magdalena Lesinska. Center for Eastern Studies. Warsaw, 2014, p.211.

2. Tomasz Komornicki, 'Flows of persons and goods across the Polish segment of the outer boundary of the European Union - results of a research project' in Tomasz Komornicki et al (ed.), *European Union: External and Internal Borders, Interactions and Networks*, Volume 20 of Europa XXI, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, 2010, p.13.

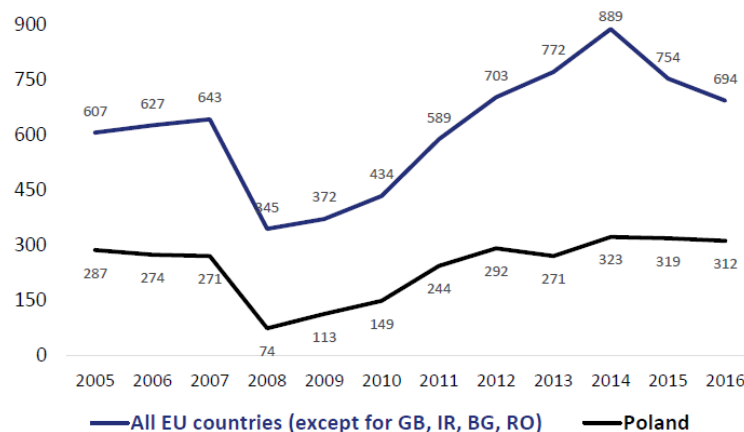
3. Authors' compilation based on the European Commission's and the Council of Ministers' data.

Belarus remains the only eastern European country without a visa facilitation agreement with the EU. Belarus and the EU started to negotiate visa facilitation and readmission agreements in 2014 and continue doing so as of late 2017. For this reason, a standard Schengen visa fee for Belarusians stands at EUR 60, while for the nationals of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia the fee is almost twice less (EUR 35). Moldovan, Georgian and Ukrainian citizens were granted visafree travel to the EU in April 2014, March 2017 and June 2017, respectively. In the best case, the visa facilitation agreement between the EU and Belarus will be effective in 2018, while a visa-free regime is a matter of a distant future. Most of Belarusian migration experts surveyed in 2014 under the Delphi research on migration trends believe this may become possible in 7-10 years.¹ Therefore, short-term mobility between Belarus and Poland will be hampered by nonexistent visa liberalization for the years to come.

In October 2003, prior to accession to the EU, Poland introduced short-term national visas for the nationals of neighbouring eastern states, including Belarus. Newly established visa requirements were rather simple and a fee for a standard Polish visa was around EUR 10. However, consequent entry of Poland into the Schengen zone resulted in a substantial increase in visa fees (up to EUR 60) and complications in visa procedures.

As a result, in 2008 the number of visas given by Polish consulates in Belarus decreased four times against the previous year. Furthermore, the number of border-crossings at the Poland - Belarus border section dropped below the level registered in 1990, which prompted talks of a "true collapse of the bilateral movement of person".² As seen in the **Graph 1**, only in 2012 the numbers of short-term visas issued by Polish consulates in Belarus surpassed the level of 2007.

Graph 1. Visas issued in Belarus by Poland and all EU states in 2005 - 2016, in thousands.³



The share of visas issued by Poland is rather high in the total number of Schengen visas given in Belarus. A good performance of Polish consulates makes Belarus fifth in the world (after Russia, China, Ukraine, and Turkey) in terms of absolute numbers of Schengen visas and first in terms of Schengen visas per capita.⁴ Furthermore, Polish consulates in Belarus are known for particularly low level of refusals in visas and for the largest share of multiple-entry Schengen visas among the EU countries' consulates in Belarus.

The performance of Polish consulates in terms of Schengen visas issuance was affected by a number of factors. First, Belarus did not allow expanding Poland's consular staff for political reasons. Second, hackers persistently intruded into Polish consulates' online registration of visa applications. This allowed visa intermediaries to charge thousands of Belarusian visa applicants substantial extra fees, sometimes exceeding EUR 100 for a visa. This problem was partly solved by establishment of authorized visa centers across Belarus in 2016. They facilitate access to visa procedures for an additional fee of EUR 15. Finally, part of consular human resources is directed to processing applications for Polish Cards.

There is no clear link between emigration from Belarus and political and visa relationships between the EU and Belarus. A constant increase in the numbers of Schengen visas in 2008 - 2014 did not result in an increase of either illegal labourers or permanent Belarusian settlers within the EU *per se*.⁵ The increase in numbers of Belarusian temporary labour migrants in Poland over the past years was largely a result of Poland's liberalization of access to its labor market as well as economic downturn in Belarus and Russia as the main receiving country of Belarusian labour migrants.

While visa procedures for Belarusian travellers to Poland have become much more costly and complicated in the last decade, lately the Belarusian government has eased travel for EU citizens including nationals of Poland. In May 2014, Belarus introduced a temporary visa-free entry during the World Ice Hockey Championship in Minsk. Based on availability of a ticket to any of the Championship games, around 30,000 foreigners visited Belarus, including a few thousand of Poles, without a visa. Similar temporary visa-free entries to Belarus are foreseen for future large sport and cultural events, such as the 2019 European Games or 2021 Ice Hockey World Championship.

Since June 2015 Belarus offers a visa-free entry to the Belarusian section of the Białowieża National Park (Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park) for up to three days. This is one of the four Belarus' material objects in the UNESCO World Heritage list. Foreigners can arrive visa-free through a specific Poland-Belarus border crossing point either on foot or by bike, based on a printed permit sent by email after the registration at the National Park's webpage.⁶ By 2017, almost 10,000 foreign tourists did so, most of them Polish nationals.

4. To compare, in 2015 about 80 Schengen visas were issued per 1,000 Belarusians, while in Russia, Ukraine, and Turkey this rates were, respectively, 24, 50 and 11. Furthermore, Belarus enjoys the smallest visa refusal rate worldwide. The share of Schengen visa refusals in Belarus stood at merely 0.3% in 2015.

5. Andrei Yeliseyev, 'Migration between the EU, V4 and Eastern Europe: The present situation and the possible future. The perspective of Belarus', in *Forecasting migration between the EU, V4 and Eastern Europe. Impact of visa abolition*, ed. by Marta Jaroszewicz, Magdalena Lesinska. Center for Eastern Studies. Warsaw, 2014, p. 208.

6. <http://bezvizy.npbp.by/en/>

Furthermore, in October 2016 Belarus allowed a visa-free entry to the tourism and recreation park Augustow Canal at the Poland-Lithuania-Belarus borderland, as well as to the Harodnia (Grodno) city and its surrounding area for up to five days. Foreigners can come to Belarus visa-free through four specific border crossing points at Poland-Belarus and Lithuania-Belarus border sections either on foot, by bike, or by boat.⁷ By November 2017, about 45,000 tourists made use of this visa-free option.

In addition to this, on 1 January 2018 the visa-free travel time for foreign citizens was extended up to ten days in several areas of Brest and Grodno regions. The new rules starting January 2018 allow nationals of 77 countries attracted by the Augustow Canal Park, to stay without visas in the entire Grodno District and the city. Visitors to the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park are able to travel to the tourism and recreation zone Brest, i.e. to the Brest city and entire four districts in its vicinity.

Probably most importantly, in February 2017 Belarus introduced a visa-free entry for up to 5 days through the Minsk airport for nationals of 80 countries, including all EU Member States. At present, a two-way plane ticket from Warsaw to Minsk costs around EUR 100 if bought well in advance. By mid-October 2017, around 56,000 foreigners visited Belarus thanks to this visa-free scheme. The largest categories of foreign travellers were nationals of Germany, Poland, Italy, the USA and the Great Britain. According to the Belarusian foreign minister, the length of the visa-free stay may be increased up to 10 or 30 days in the future.⁸ While this is a significant ease of travel for some Polish nationals, arrival by plane through Minsk is not a preferred option for many Poles.

In addition to the maximum number of days as five and airplane as the only possible mode of transportation, yet another limitation of this visa-free initiative is that foreigners cannot arrive from or depart to Russian airports. Nevertheless, soon after this Belarus' decision to launch a visa-free regime, the Kremlin introduced a so called border zone at Belarus-Russia border. As long the passport control points were erected on Russian side at specific roads connecting Belarus and Russia, since March 2017 Belarusians have to carry a national passport with them in order to prove they are not third country nationals and to continue their journey.

Furthermore, in case a national of Belarus is not just transiting a border zone on the way to further mainland Russia but for some reason plans to stay at the border zone (about 30 km away from the border line), he / she is supposed to ask the Russian border committee for a special permit in advance. In other words, the freedom of movement of nationals of Belarus in Russia has become limited in cases of stay in the newly-established border zone, i.e. the territory within about 30 km from the state border.

7. See: Mikhal Karnievich, *Border crossing point on Augustow channel is open for pedestrians and bikers* (in Belarusian). Radio Liberty, 28 April 2017, <https://www.svaboda.org/a/lisanaja-rudawka/28457810.html>

8. Makei does not rule out that Belarus would prolong a visa-free stay up to 30 days (in Russian). BelTA, 24 October 2017, <http://www.belta.by/society/view/makejne-iskljuchaet-uvelichenie-belarusju-bezvizovogo-rezhima-do-30-dnej-272861-2017/>

2. Current trends in temporary labour migration from Belarus.

9. Asked to list the top destination countries, the experts placed Poland in the second place, ahead of the United States and Germany.

10. Viacheslav Zhakevich. *Migration intentions of the population of the Republic of Belarus: sociological analysis* (in Russian). PhD thesis, Minsk, 2009, pp.60-64.

11. *Op.cit.* Andrei Yeliseyeu, pp.199-200.

12. Work permits issued to foreign citizens. Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Poland (in Polish), <https://www.mpips.gov.pl/analizy-i-raporty/cudzoziemcy-pracujacy-w-polsce-statystyki/>

13. Authors' compilation based on the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy data.

14. For different reasons a large part of individuals do not eventually come to Poland. This is the case for nationals of other countries eligible under the simplified employment scheme likewise.

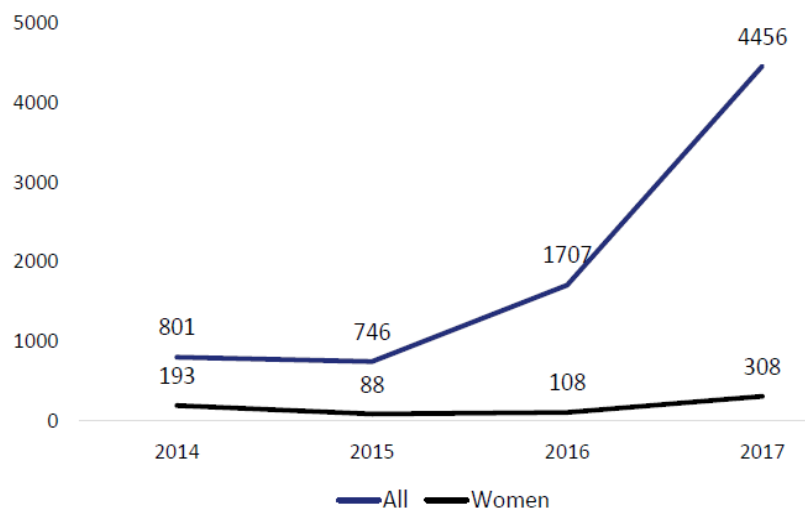
15. It should be noted that the actual number of employed foreigners does not equal the number of registered statements as for some foreigners more than one statements are issued, some are refused a visa or change their plans concerning arrival to Poland.

Migration experts suggest that Poland is the most popular destination country for Belarusian migrants after Russia.⁹ This conforms to the available statistical data and results of nationwide polls on migration propensity of Belarusians. Indeed, Germany, Russia, the United States and Poland were consistently named by Belarusians as the most attractive states for both temporary labour migration and permanent emigration in national surveys measuring migration intentions.¹⁰

In the past decade Poland has facilitated access to its labour market and to its higher education system. Furthermore, it simplified procedures for obtaining citizenship for some categories of Belarusians. As a consequence, the country has become a more popular destination for both temporary labour migrants and permanent immigrants from Belarus.¹¹

Compared to the flows of labour migrants from Ukraine, temporary labour migration of Belarusians to Poland (and to the EU as a whole) has been rather limited. However, in the last years a clear upward trend in the numbers of work permits issued to Belarus' nationals is observed. According to the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 1,893 work permits were issued to Belarusians in 2015 (746 in January - June 2015). In 2016 the figure increased to 4,870 (1,707 in January-June 2016), while in the first half of 2017 the number reached 4,456.¹²

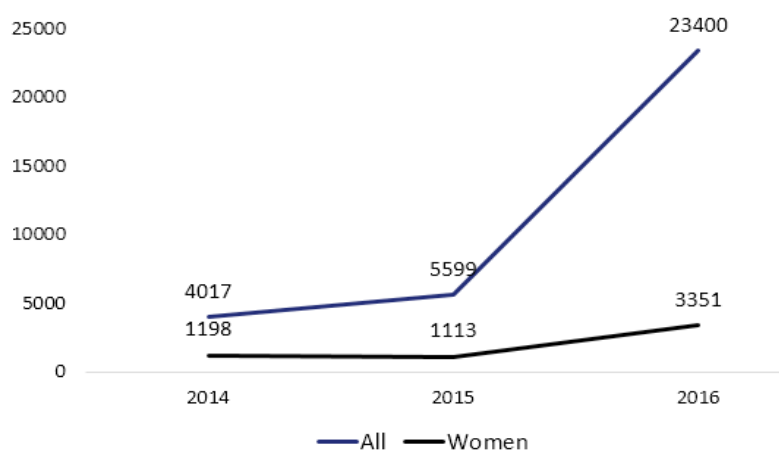
Graph 2. Numbers of work permits issued to Belarusians in 2014 - 2017, half-year results.¹³



Overall, in 2016 the number of registered statements for Belarus' nationals by Polish employers under the simplified work scheme stood at 23,400.¹⁴ The number of statements in the first half 2017 was even larger, i.e. 24,216. This is a substantial increase considering that the number of registered statements for Belarusians in the whole year of 2015 was just 5,599.¹⁵

It follows from available Polish data that most of the Belarusian labour migrants are males aged under 40. Statistics shows that in 2016 20% of all registered statements were given to the Belarus' nationals younger than 26 years old, 54% to the people aged 26-40 years. Most popular spheres of employment are transport and storage (26%), administrative services (23%) and construction (21%). At the same time, agricultural sphere is much less popular among Belarusians (4% of all registered statements) than among Ukrainian labour migrants (26%). As for the average monthly salaries in Poland in the sectors most popular among Belarusian migrants they often three times higher than those in Belarus.

Graph 3. Number of registered statements for Belarus' nationals by Polish employers.¹⁶



There is a consensus among migration experts that most migrants of Belarusian origin reside in Poland and perform their economic activities legally. On average, the experts surveyed within a past research project agree that the share of regular migrants among the total number of Belarusian residents in Poland exceeds 80%.¹⁷

In addition to Poland's liberalization of access to its labour market, there are two other important reasons why the numbers of Belarusian labour migrants to Poland are likely to continue growing. An economic downturn and mass staff cuts in Belarus and an economic stagnation in Russia push thousands of Belarusian labour migrants to look towards Poland. Belarus' economy contracted by 3.9 percent in 2015 and 2.6 percent in 2016. In 2017 the Belarus' GDP is projected to increase by around 1.5 percent but general Belarus' economic outlook remains bleak. In the last three years real incomes of Belarus' population substantially decreased and state-owned enterprises¹⁸ had to turn to mass layoffs.

According to Belarusian statistics, in 2015-2016 the number of laid-off workers from state-owned enterprises exceeded the number of newly employed workers by 190,000. Furthermore, hidden unemployment has increased in the last years, when labor relations with employer remain only on paper. Previously, Belarus' state policy to ensure the highest level of employ-

16. Authors' compilation based on the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy data.

17. *Op.cit.* Andrei Yeliseyeu, p. 200.

18. The share of employment in the public of semi-public sector is almost 70%, comparable to the share of GDP produced by the public sector.

ment possible in public sector was rather consistent. In many cases it resulted in preservation of outdated and economically unjustified jobs.

Paultry unemployment benefits in Belarus (about EUR 10 per month, which is 15% of the state poverty level) discourage unemployed individuals from registering with state employment agencies. As long as the national legislation considers as “unemployed” those working age citizens who are registered with the state employment agency, the authorities can use statistical sleight of hand, declaring that the official unemployment rate in Belarus is only about 1%.¹⁹ Instead of reforming ineffective social security system, in 2013 Belarus introduced the so-called Decree on Prevention of Social Parasitism, which imposes a new levy on people who are employed for less than 183 days in a given year. In response to mass social protests in February-March 2017 triggered by the mentioned decree, Belarus’ authorities declared their plans to introduce changes in the document.

The strongest migration pull factors among Belarusians are higher wages and generally high living standards in destination countries and the presence of migration networks, i.e. residing/employed relatives or close friends, or at least the existence of a strong group of compatriots in a destination country. At the same time, the dominant reasons why Belarusians are not willing to migrate is reluctance to part with family and friends.²⁰ A mandatory placement scheme for university graduates limits labour mobility for young Belarusian professionals. Students who graduate from state universities where the tuition for their study was paid by the state have to work for an employer assigned by the state for (usually) two years following graduation. Those who refuse to take an assigned job, have to repay a large sum of money for having had their studies subsidized by the state. Since the compensation to the state in this case is too high, some graduates are discouraged from seeking work abroad.²¹

The state of Russia’s economy is an important exogenous factor influencing Belarusian migration flows to Poland and the EU as whole. Russia remains the predominantly preferred destination country for Belarusian labour migrants for a number of reasons, including institutional (equal rights on Russia’s labour market) and economic (wage differentials). The language barriers and a deficit of migration networks in Poland and are further explanatory factors of Russia’s larger popularity among Belarusian migrants. On the other hand, migration networks can grow over time and most of Belarusians have at least passive reception of Polish language. As a result of the economic stagnation in Russia and depreciation of the Russian ruble, thousands of Belarusian labor migrants returned home or reduced the number of their work trips to Russia. Consequently, the cost benefit balance for a part of Belarusian temporary labourers has shifted to Polish labour market. In other words, in the past years a part of Belarusian labour migrants started reorienting from Russia towards the West.

19. *Op cit.* Andrei Yeliseyeu, p. 206.

20. *Ibid*, pp. 202-204. It should be mentioned that formal organizations created by Belarusian migrants in Poland are quite inoperative or are still at an early stage of development and are unable to provide lasting support for the compatriots. Associations formed by Belarusian diaspora abroad mostly concentrate on the promotion of cultural traditions rather than proving recent migrants with necessary information or material support.

21. *Ibid*, p. 205.

3. Polish Cards and long-term travel arrangements.

22. Belarus National Census 2009. Population by ethnicity and mother tongue (in Russian). Belarusian Statistical Committee, http://www.belstat.gov.by/upload-belstat/upload-belstat-pdf/perepis_2009/5.8-0.pdf

23. Belarus National Census 2009. Population by ethnicity and languages spoken at home (in Russian). Belarusian Statistical Committee, http://www.belstat.gov.by/upload-bel-stat/upload-belstat-pdf/perepis_2009/5.9-0.pdf

24. Polish Card. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/foreign-policy/polish_diaspora/card_of_the_pole/

25. In the following year Polish Card holders are entitled to financial assistance (in Polish). Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce, 15 March, 2017, <http://pol-ukr-krakow.com/od-nowego-roku-posiadacze-karty-polaka-moga-liczyc-na-pomoc-finansowa/>

The Polish minority in Belarus is composed of 295,000 people according to the 2009 Belarus census and is concentrated in the Poland–Belarus borderland. According to available data, 58 percent and 34 percent of the Polish minority representatives named Belarusian and Russian as their mother tongues, respectively, while only 5 percent opted for Polish.²² When asked what language they speak at home, less than 2 percent chose Polish, while Belarusian and Russian were selected by 41 percent and 51 percent of ethnic Poles, respectively.²³ There is no significantly larger propensity to emigrate among the ethnic Poles living in Belarus, since for the most part they are well integrated into local society. At the same time, liberalization of access to the Polish labour market has created incentives for Polish minority to undertake temporary or permanent emigration to Poland.

The Act of 7 September 2007 on Polish Card allowed nationals of Belarus with ancestry of Polish nationality or Polish citizenship to apply for the Polish Cards. They authorise its holders inter alia to seek employment in Poland without a work permit, to carry out economic activity in Poland on the same basis as Polish citizens and, since May 2014, to obtain a permanent residence permit easily.²⁴ Furthermore, since September 2016 the Polish Card holders can acquire a Polish citizenship within a year, after a year of permanent residence.

Since January 2017 the Polish Card holders applying for a permanent residence as well as their spouses are granted with state financial assistance during first 9 months of their residence in Poland. Such individuals are entitled to a monthly allowance of PLN 925 (around EUR 220) during the first three months and of PLN 555 (EUR 130) for each of the next six months. In case a couple has children, each kid is additionally granted with a monthly allowance of PLN 462.5 (EUR 110) and PLN 277.5 (EUR 65) during the first three months and the consequent six months, respectively. Furthermore, since the beginning of 2017 a permanent residence permit based on the Polish Card is issued gratis instead of a previous combined fee of PLN 690 (EUR 160) for the issuance of a decision and an actual permit.²⁵

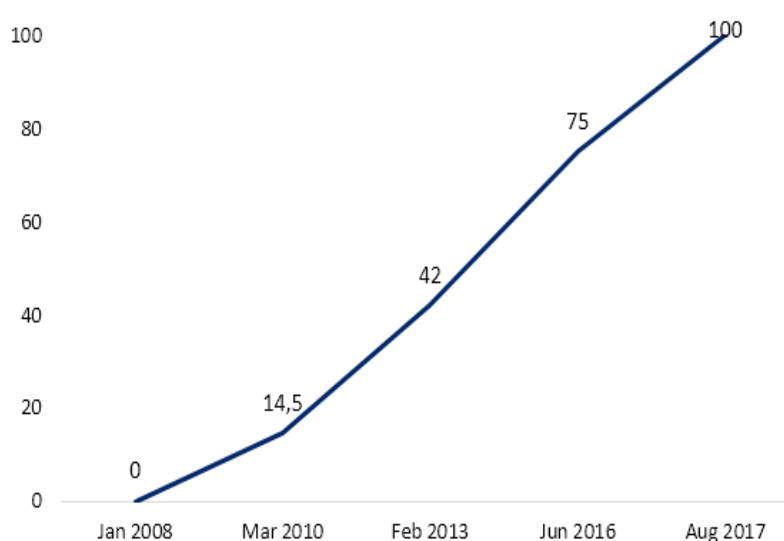
According to initial version of the law, a command of Polish and at least one parent, or a grandparent, or two great-grandparents who had either a Polish ethnicity or a Polish citizenship allowed an applicant to qualify for a Polish Card. Therefore, hundreds of thousands if not millions of Belarusians could theoretically apply for a Polish Card. Following the 1921 Peace of Riga, the present-day Belarus was divided between the Soviet Russia and Poland. Belarus reunited in 1939 under the Soviet Union after the start of the WWII.

In October 2017 the Polish parliament adopted amendments into the Act on Polish Card, removing the Polish citizenship of ancestors as a

ground for granting a Polish Card. In December 2017 Polish President Andrzej Duda signed this bill into law. Therefore, the latest amendments require that the applicant's ancestors had a Polish ethnicity. For this reason, the numbers of applications for Polish Cards in Belarus will likely decrease in the coming years.

Polish Cards have become a rather effective tool of Poland's soft power among Belarus' population. Polish Card applicants were not necessarily Polish minority members with a sense of belonging to the Polish nation who seek a stronger bond with a historic motherland, as the preamble of the Act on Polish Card implies. In many cases, they are individuals with solely practical considerations such as facilitation of their employment in Poland, getting a state education scholarship or a way to receive a long-term national Polish visa allowing free travel across the Schengen zone. In any case, numbers of the Polish Cards issued to Belarusians exceeded 100,000 by August 2017.²⁶ Since Polish Cards are valid for 10 years and their issuance started in 2008, this figure does not include cases of renewed Polish Cards, i.e. the figure corresponds to the number of individuals who received the respective document.

Graph 4. Numbers of Polish Cards issued in Belarus, in thousand.²⁷



26. Ilya Malinovskij. Belarusians received about 100,000 of Polish Cards, which a half of the Polish Cards issued globally (in Russian). Euroradio, 17 August 2017, <https://euroradio.fm/ru/belorusy-poluchili-okolo-100-tysyach-kart-polyaka-polovinu-iz-vy-dannyh-v-mire>

27. Author's compilation based on public sources.

28. Decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus of 7 April 2011 № II-258/2011 On the position of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus concerning the Law of the Republic of Poland On the Polish Card (in Russian), <http://www.kc.gov.by/main.aspx?guid=23203>

In spring 2011 the Belarusian Constitutional Court delivered a decision saying that the Polish legislation concerning the Polish Cards goes against the principles of international law and violates a number of international and bilateral agreements.²⁸ According to later amendments to the Belarusian law On the State Service, state official's possession of the Polish Cards and similar documents issued by other foreign countries is a ground for discharge from office. However, these legal counter measures did not affect the functioning of the Polish consulates, and the numbers of Polish Cards among Belarusian nationals continued growing as seen in the Graph 4.

In April 2017 Polish president Andrzej Duda signed amendments into the Law on Repatriation providing for a new form of financial and personal assistance to Polish repatriates. The law facilitates the repatriations of individuals with Polish ancestry up to fourth generation. According to the new legislation, adaptation centers will be set up and repatriates placed in the centers will get a monthly allowance of PLN 200 (around EUR 45). Some other options for financial assistance and access to medical services are contained in the new law.²⁹

As of January 1, 2017 the number of Belarusian holders of valid residence permits in Poland was 11,428. Out of them 7,716 individuals had permanent residence. The number of Belarusian students in 2016/2017 reached 5,119, making Belarusians the second largest nationality studying in Poland after Ukrainians (35,584).³⁰ Although in the last years the numbers of residence permits issued to Belarusian did not grow, the number of Polish Card holders who stay in Poland temporarily or permanently based on national long-term visas has probably increased though not reflected in statistics.

A 2012 research that used an econometric formula with GDP per capita taken as an explanatory variable suggests that circa 35,000 Belarus citizens would migrate to Poland during next 10 years if Belarus's and Poland's GDPs change with the same rate.³¹ Taken that Belarus went through the substantial economic decline in 2015-2016 and its economic prospects remain gloomy, national GDPs have diverged in the past years faster than expected and will likely continue doing so. Therefore, one can expect a larger emigration of Belarusians to Poland in the years to come than the projection suggested a few years ago.

Attempts to reform the social security system, education, the labour market and many other spheres in Belarus are persistently obstructed by the Belarusian ruler Alexander Lukashenko. Since effective emigration policy requires substantial financial means and they are beyond the capabilities of the Belarusian budget, we expect further efforts of the Belarusian authorities to erect barriers for potential emigrants to the EU. Nevertheless, they will largely be ineffective and will hardly stem the outflow of migrants.

Taking into consideration non-existence of labour market reforms, the low return on education and increasing demographic pressure in Belarus, the propensity to emigrate, especially among highly qualified Belarusian specialists, will likely increase. Belarus will likely see a larger outbound migration of highly qualified individuals to Poland and other EU countries and even larger temporary migration of labourers of various specialities to the Polish labour market, who would support their families by providing money transfers. Taking into account the widening gap in GDP per capita in Poland's favour, one can expect that permanent and temporary migration flows from Belarus to Poland will continue growing.

29. New repatriation law 'your ticket home' – Polish PM to repatriates. PAP, 15 March 2017, <http://www.pap.pl/en/news/news,863608,new-repatriation-law-your-ticket-home--polish-pm-to-repatriates.html>

30. Demographic yearbook of Poland, 2017. Central Statistical Office, pp.449-450. Available at <http://bit.ly/2zw7DaJ>

31. Vashko I. 2012. Labour mobility between Belarus and Poland as a local aspect of European integration. Belarus and European Union: unrealized potential. Minsk, pp. 241-257.

3. A much awaited and delayed local border traffic.

The 2006 EU Regulation makes it possible for the EU states to agree with neighbouring countries on a visa-free land border-crossing regime for border residents living within 30-50 kilometers from the border. These types of agreements are titled local border traffic agreements (LBTAs). Taken that a visa free regime between Belarus and the EU will apparently not be the case in the years to come, Belarusian authorities can at least facilitate mobility for its border residents residing by the EU borders by signing the LBTAs. However, in practice Belarus has been continuously blocking such agreements with Poland and Lithuania for the last seven years.

Although LBTAs between Belarus and Poland, Belarus and Lithuania were signed and ratified yet back in 2010, in each of the two cases Belarus stopped short of taking the final necessary step, namely sending a diplomatic note indicating readiness to launch the agreement. A Belarus-Latvia LBT regime was launched in 2012, but as seen in the Table 1 the Belarus-Latvia borderland is much less populous than the borderlands with Poland or Lithuania.

Table 1. Borderlands between Belarus and the EU countries under respective LBTAs.

	Length of the border	Population in the EU MS border area	Population in Belarus' border area
Latvia-Belarus	171 km	166,000	65,000
Lithuania-Belarus	680 km	800,000	600,000
Poland-Belarus	605 km	600,000	900,000

A prolonged delay with the Belarus-Poland LBTAs is a result of a combination of political and economic considerations.³² Belarus' relations with Poland cooled in 2011-2013 as a result of the latter's proactive position concerning the introduction of EU sanctions and the policy of democratization towards Belarus. During this period of time political tensions were repeatedly cited by Belarusian officials as a barrier to introduce a LBT regime. Another factor can be Belarusian authorities' concern over greater awareness of population about the higher living standards in the EU countries, which may cause a further distrust in Belarus' economic and political policies.

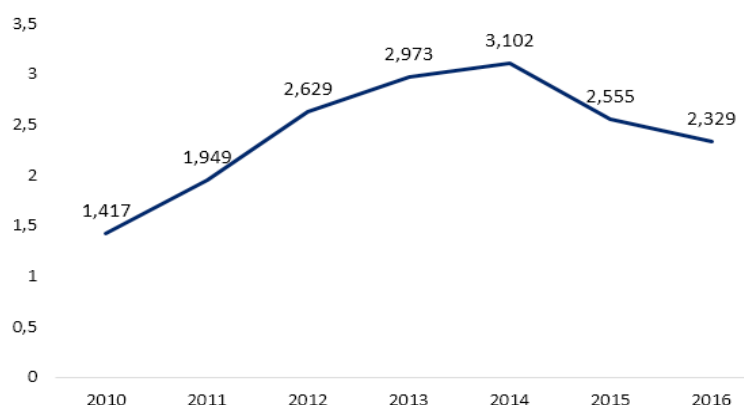
Furthermore, the Belarusian authorities are seemingly concerned with increase of Belarus nationals' expenses in Poland and Lithuania. Belarusian officials repeatedly expressed their discontent over frequent shopping of Belarusians abroad. In 2013 Alexander Lukashenko even voiced an

32. Andrei Yeliseyev. Keeping the door ajar. Local border traffic regimes on the EU's eastern borders. Finnish Institute of International Affairs, FIIA Report 41, 2014, pp.70-74, www.fia.fi/assets/publications/FIIA_Report_41_web.pdf

idea to impose an exit tax worth of USD 100 on Belarusians travelling abroad. Admittedly, facilitated mobility of border residents will increase purchases of consumer goods in Poland and Lithuania, which would worsen the Belarus' balance of payments.

As seen in the Graph 5, in 2014 alone Belarusians spent in Poland about EUR 730 million on consumer goods not registered in customs declarations. In 2015-2016 the figure went down because of the economic downturn in Belarus and decreased purchasing ability of the Belarusian population. While for the Polish citizens fuel and alcohol account for up to 80% of total expenses in the Belarusian border area, Belarusian consumers are interested in diverse categories of Polish goods. They include, among other things, building materials, motor spare parts, clothing and footwear, household appliances, radio and television articles, meat and other food products.

Graph 5. Expenses by Belarus' nationals in Poland, 2010 – 2016, millions of Polish zlotys.³³



33. Author's compilation based on the Statistical Office in Rzeszow. As of October 2017, 1 EUR was equalled around 4,23 Polish zlotys.

34. Big steps of the local border traffic regime (in Russian). Belarus Today, № 5 (24887), 13 January 2016, <http://www.sb.by/obshchestvo/article/bolshie-shagi-malogo-prigranichnogo-dvizheniya.html>

In 2016 the Belarusian side repeatedly cited an underdeveloped border infrastructure as the actual reason for a lengthy delay with launching LBTAs with Poland and Lithuania. According to the article published in Belarus Today, official newspaper of the presidential administration, by Leonid Maltsev, the Head of the State Border Committee, "preliminary calculations show that about a trillion of [old] Belarusian rubles [around USD 50 mln – note] are needed for the full-scale functioning of LBTAs with our neighbours"³⁴

Over the last years the Belarusian authorities came up with a variety of arguments supporting their unwillingness to introduce visa-free entries for border residents living by Polish and Lithuanian borders. Despite a large part of residents on both sides of the border are enthusiastic about LBTAs, political and economic considerations of the Belarus' authorities make the prospects of LBTAs unclear.

Conclusion.

Short-term mobility between Belarus and Poland remains hampered by the absence of a visa facilitation agreement between the EU and Belarus. At the same time, lately Belarus has unilaterally introduced a number of options allowing EU citizens to visit Belarus visa-free. They include a visa-free travel up to ten days to several areas of Brest and Grodno regions, but most remarkably a visa-free travel through the Minsk airport for up to 5 days.

In the last three years, we observe a clear upward trend in temporary labour mobility from Belarus to Poland. The number of work permits issued to Belarusians in the first half of 2017 (4,456) exceeds the figure for the whole year of 2015 (1,893). In 2016, the number of registered statements for Belarus' nationals by Polish employers under the simplified work scheme stood at 23,400, compared to 5,599 in 2015. Furthermore, in the first half 2017 the number of statements reached 24,216. Most popular spheres of employment among Belarusians are transport and storage (26%), administrative services (23%) and construction (21%). The overwhelming majority of Belarusian migrant workers in Poland are males under 40. Although Russia remains the predominantly preferred destination country for Belarusian labour migrants, in the last years the cost benefit balance for a part of Belarusian labourers shifted to Poland due to economic stagnation in Russia.

Although in the last years the numbers of residence permits issued to Belarusians did not grow, unknown number of Polish Card holders stay in Poland temporarily or permanently based on national long-term visas. Polish Cards have become an important tool of Poland's soft power among Belarusian population. By August 2017, the number of Polish Cards issued in Belarus exceeded 100,000. In the past two years, Poland substantially facilitated acquisition of a Polish citizenship by Polish Card holders and directed financial assistance to the Polish Card holders who apply for a permanent residence in Poland as well as to their spouses and children. However, as a consequence of the latest amendments into the Act on Polish Card requiring that the applicant's ancestors had a Polish ethnicity not merely citizenship, numbers of applications for Polish Cards in Belarus will likely decrease in the coming years.

Over the last years, the Belarusian authorities came up with a variety of arguments supporting their unwillingness to introduce visa-free regimes for border residents living by Polish and Lithuanian borders. Despite a large part of residents on both sides of the border are enthusiastic about local border traffic agreements, political and economic considerations of the Belarus' authorities make the prospects of LBTAs unclear.

Taking into account the widening gap in GDP per capita in Poland's favour, one can expect that permanent and temporary migration flows from Belarus to Poland will continue growing. Taking into consideration non-existence of labour market reforms, the low return on education and increasing demographic pressure in Belarus, the propensity to emigrate, especially among highly qualified Belarusian specialists, will likely increase.



Eurasian States in Transition

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