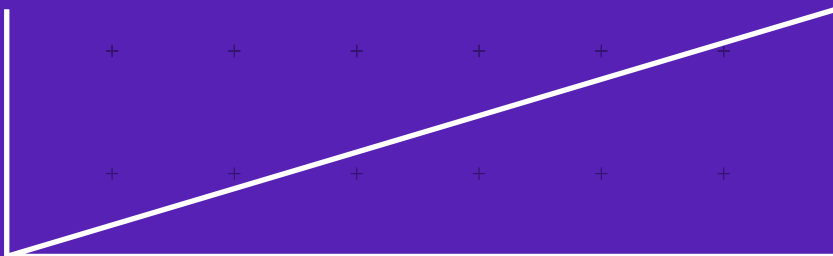


CENTER FOR NEW IDEAS

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BELARUS RESILIENCE INDEX 2023



HENADZ KORSHUNAU AND ALESIA RUDNIK



Over the last year, Belarus faced multiple challenges — both internationally and domestically. In 2023 the Belarusian government expanded the scale and demographic sweep of repressions and instigated targeted provocations on the borders of Poland and Lithuania; it also became a player in Russia’s domestic policy games. Due to crises in the economic, political, and energy spheres, as well as a military rapprochement with Russia, Belarus has weakened its positions as an international player, safe neighbour, and reliable trading partner. Emigration from Belarus intensified in 2023: more and more emigrants are assimilating legally and culturally to life abroad, building professional and informal networks in new countries. Although fears that Belarusian troops — as Russian allies — would enter Ukrainian territory did not materialise, and the military presence of Russia and private mercenary organizations is now lower, Belarus remains a regional threat and a potential base for strengthening Russia’s military power. As such, we have retained the military sphere as a provisional one in the Resiliency Index, as it reflects the aggravated and prolonged crisis in Belarus as a complex system.

The main objective of the Index is to determine the spheres in which Belarus is either the most vulnerable or the most resilient: able to overcome crises, adapt to their consequences, and develop.

1. The total Resilience Index of the country is -1.96, which represents a negligible change compared to previous years’ indices (-1.88 in 2021 and -2.17 in 2022).
2. Experts’ evaluations were slightly higher in all the spheres. Nevertheless, like last year, experts deemed all of them to be in crisis. The **political** and **information** spheres remain in the most difficult positions (-2.40 and -2.33 respectively). Assessments of the economy were the most optimistic. In this sphere, ratings rose by 0.48 points.
3. According to the experts, the areas in the worst state included **friendly environment for media work** (-4.63) and **domestic policy** (-4.26). Areas such as **public organizations** (-3.02) and relations between society and the state (-3.65) continue to be in a state of crisis. Several areas went from “dire crisis” to just “crisis”, including **foreign policy** (-2.82, compared to -3.40 in 2022), **resources for development** (from -3.31 in 2022 to -2.59) and **media diversity** (from -3.09 to -2.48).

4. Of all the areas of the main spheres, only three received positive assessments: ***the diaspora*** (+1.78) in the social sphere, ***infrastructure*** (0.73) in the information sphere, and ***social infrastructure*** (+0.18) in the political sphere.
5. In terms of changes to evaluations of areas in the main spheres, then ***relations between society and the state*** saw the biggest drop (-0.85), whereas the greatest improvements were observed for the ***economic base*** (+0.80) and ***resources for development*** (+0.72) in the economic sphere.

Last year, expert assessments pointed to the need for a complete reset of all spheres of life in society, a problem far greater than just a national crisis. The year, the Resiliency Index is -1.96. This is a reflection of the crisis affecting all spheres of life in Belarusian society. We deem change to be “significant” if the indicator changes by more than 0.5 in any direction.

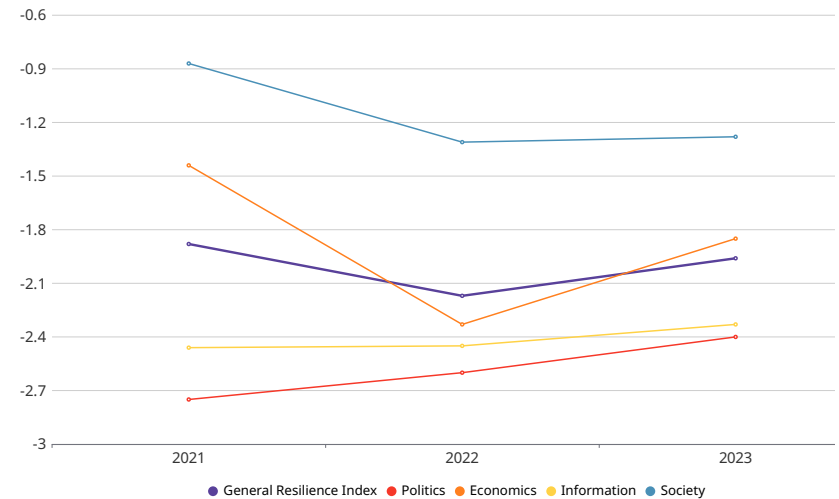
We attribute the general statistically significant improvement of experts’ opinions in several spheres to the following factors. If we compare the current state of affairs with experts’ pessimistic evaluations following the start of the latest phase of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it becomes clear that the most dire forecasts did not come to pass (e.g., the entry of Belarusian troops into the Russian-Ukrainian war or the collapse of the Belarusian economy). In addition, the Belarusian regime, in a certain sense, has managed to “maintain” both the socio-political and economic situation in the country¹, albeit by mounting repressive pressure on society and managing the economy “manually”, as well as honing its strategies for circumventing sanctions and searching out new political partners.

¹ See, for instance, the BEROС report “Income and household consumer confidence in October 2023”
<https://beroc.org/upload/medialibrary/c89/c8996b580a44da236375b5fe2916fecb.pdf>

TRENDS: WHAT HAS CHANGED BETWEEN 2021 AND 2023?

Experts opinions have remained practically unchanged over the last three years — both at the level of society as a whole and individual spheres (we define “change” to mean an evaluation going up or down by 0.5 on a scale of +5 to -5). The country, like all of its spheres of life, was and remains in a state of crisis.

If we look at the situation in terms of individual indicators, we can see both positive and negative developments. Significant negative trends were recorded for several indicators, including **budgetary and financial activities** (-1.05 compared to 2021) and the **national-cultural foundation** (-1.09 compared to 2021). Budgetary and financial activities were and remain in a state of stagnation, while the national-cultural foundation moved into the crisis zone. Insignificant negative dynamics were also characteristic of assessments of **civic culture** (-0.88 in the last two years); this downturn caused it to drop out of the “stagnation” zone and into “crisis.” Insignificant positive developments were noted in areas such as **media diversity** — +0.99 over the last two years, elevating it from the “critical”, to merely the “crisis” zone; **law and order** — +0.63 in two years and an improvement from “critical” to “crisis”; and the **public administration system** (+0.52), which remains in a state of crisis.



ABOUT THE RESILIENCE INDEX

The Resilience Index is a holistic expert evaluation of a country as a multi-factor, complex system. It was developed by Henadz Korshunau and Alesia Rudnik, researchers at the Center for New Ideas, as a tool for identifying and tracking trends in the most resilient and vulnerable spheres of life in Belarus. A better understanding of the strong and weak points of the Belarusian system can help future policy-makers identify what reforms to prioritize, as well as deconstruct the current system.

The Resilience Index is published in early 2024 based on the results of 2023. The Resilience Index is a new approach to evaluating the current state of the country as a multifaceted system. During our research, we interviewed 45 Belarusian experts to assess the resilience of five spheres: the political, economic, social, information, and military spheres. When we were devising our methodology, we decided that the Index should be based on expert assessments. This was the model used to develop V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy)², MSI (Media Sustainability)³, Quality of Government⁴ and other indices. This expert assessment method allowed us to evaluate indicators that are difficult to describe quantitatively⁵.

SPHERE	EXPERTS
Politics	11 experts
Economics	11 experts
Society	10 experts
Information sphere	10 experts
Military (<i>not factored into the final RI</i>)	3 experts

² <https://www.v-dem.net/about/v-dem-project>

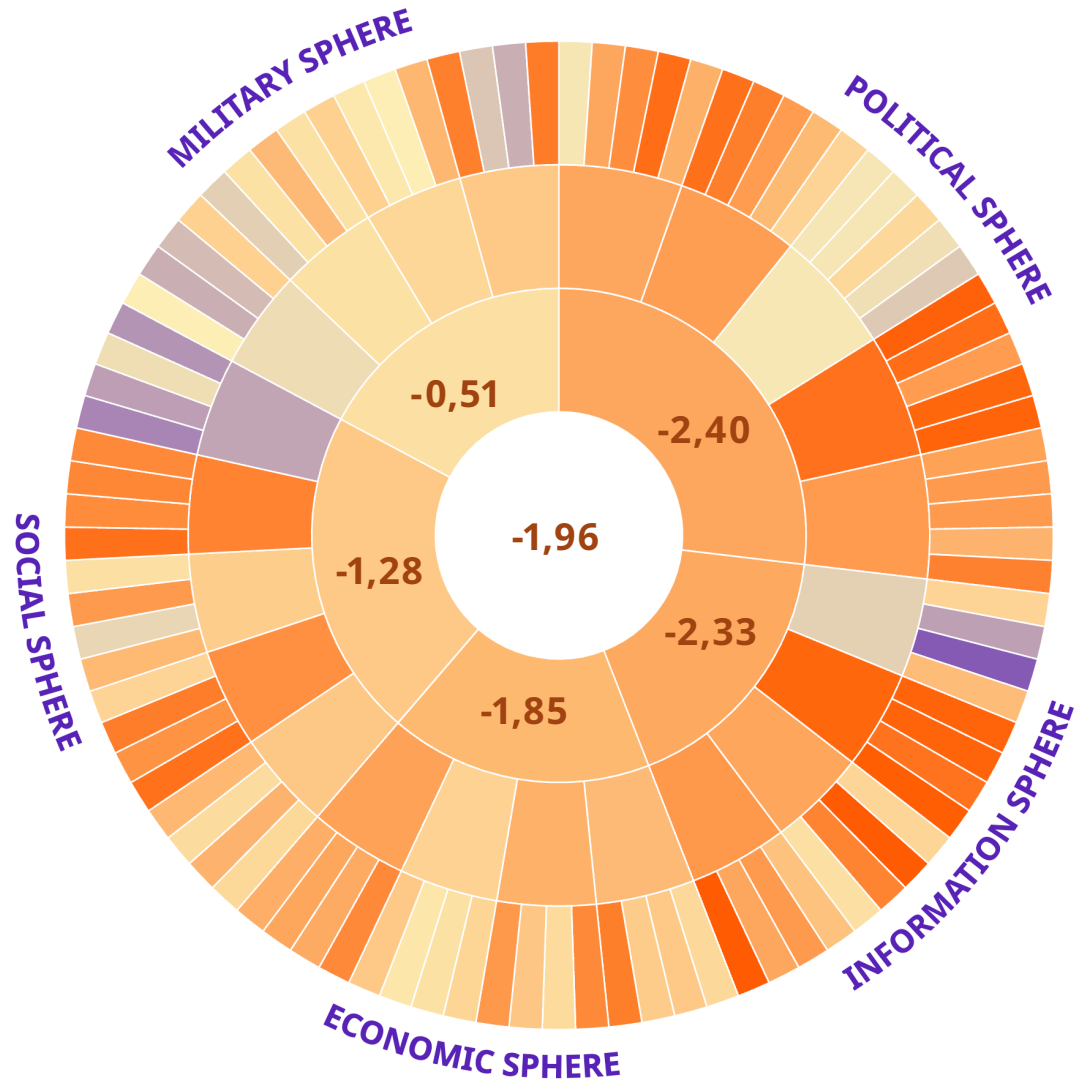
³ <https://www.irex.org/resource/media-sustainability-index-msi>

⁴ <https://www.gu.se/en/quality-government/qog-data>

⁵ <https://www.v-dem.net/about/v-dem-project/methodology/>



INDEX 2023



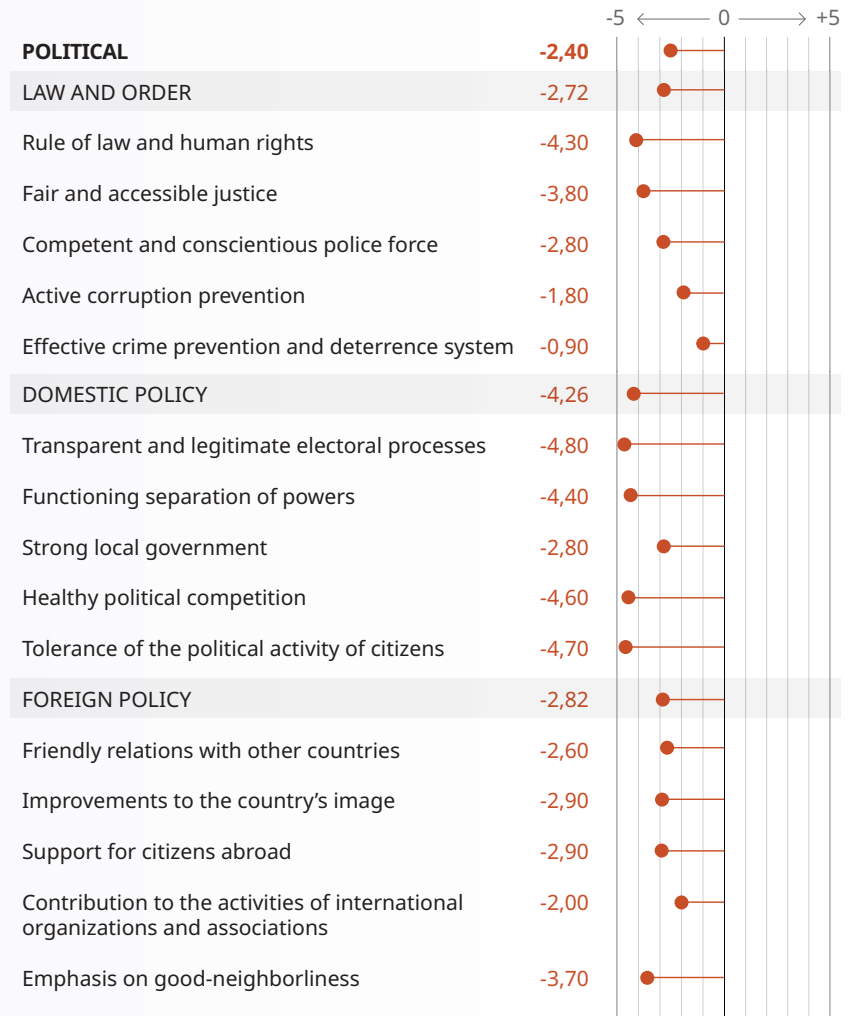


POLITICAL SPHERE

According to experts, like last year, the **political** sphere is in the worst shape in Belarus. Nevertheless, the situation seems to be stabilising. Whereas in 2021 the RI of the political sphere was -2.75, in 2022 it was -2.60 and in 2023 it is -2.40.

Like the last 2 years, the main factor driving these evaluations is **internal politics**, where the situation continues to be near collapse (RI=-4.26). This is one of the lowest evaluations of all the areas the Index covers. The indicators of this area that fared the worst were *legitimate electoral processes* (RI=-4.80; as in past years, this is the lowest evaluation of all the Index's indicators), *tolerance of the political activity of citizens* (RI=-4.70), and *healthy political competition* (RI=-4.0).

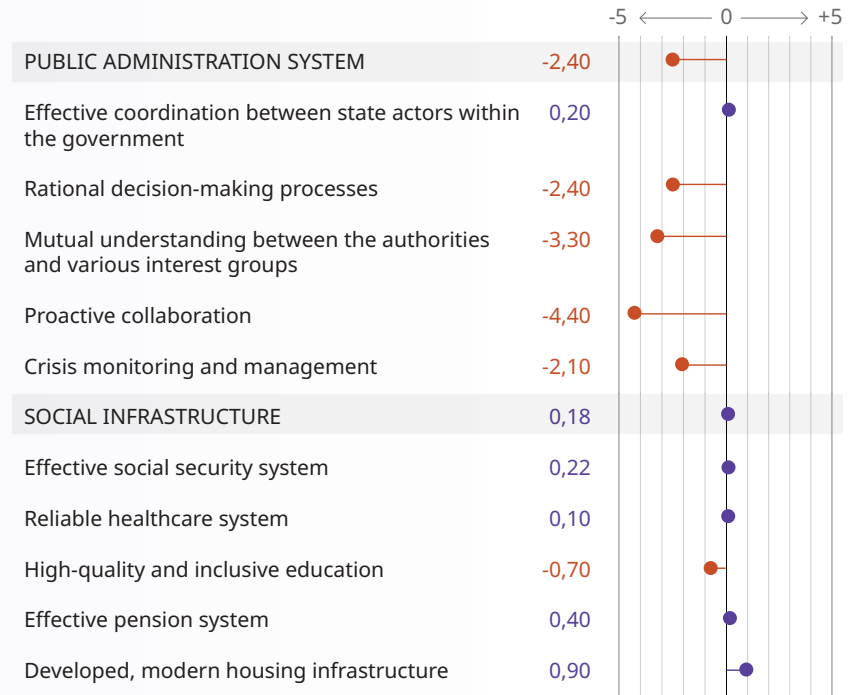
Areas such as **law and order** (RI=-2.72), the **public administration system** (RI=-2.40), and **foreign policy** (RI=-2.82) received evaluations corresponding to a crisis situation. We should note that over the last two years, expert assessments of all three of these areas improved somewhat; for **foreign policy** it was in 2023 that the improvement (of 0.58 points) occurred.





Major drivers of improved assessments of foreign policy were indicators such as *contribution to the activities of international organizations and associations* (-2.00, or a 0.91 point improvement on last year), *friendly relations with other countries* (-2.60, or a 0.67 point improvement on last year), and the *diminished toxicity of the country's image* (-2.90, a 0.92 point improvement on 2022).

Like last year, the only area that received a positive evaluation in the political sphere was **social infrastructure** (RI=0.18; in 2022 it was -0.16; in 2021 it was -0.36). The highest ratings in this area were assigned to *developed, modern housing infrastructure* (RI=0.90). The following systems also received positive evaluations: *pensions* (0.40), *social security* (0.22), and *healthcare* (0.22). At the same time, over the past year evaluations of the healthcare system saw a slight drop.



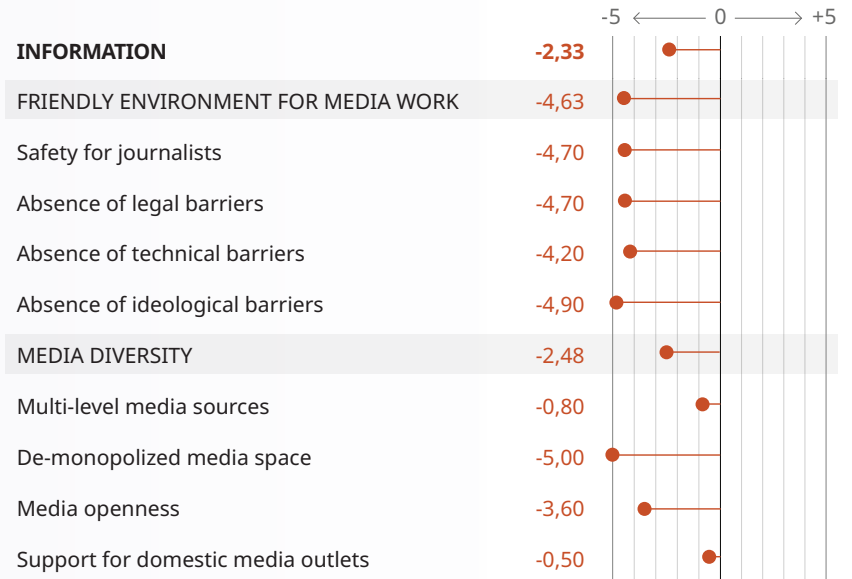
INFORMATION SPHERE

Compared to last year, evaluations of the information sphere barely changed (RI= -2.33, compared to -2.45 in 2022 and -2.46 in 2021); it continues to be in a state of crisis.

The situation surrounding the **environment for media work** continues to raise the most concerns ; it was evaluated at -4.43 points (the lowest evaluation in all the Index's areas) All indicators in this area received less than -4 points, meaning they are near collapse.

Unlike last year, indicators such as **media diversity** improved slightly (-2.48 compared to -3.09 last year). The improvement in ratings can be attributed to significant growth in indicators such as *support for domestic media outlets*: from -1.55 in 2022 to -0.50 in 2023. Experts explain the growth of the indicator by pointing to the increase in financial support for state media outlets. On the other hand the indicator *de-monopolised media space* received the absolute lowest possible rating: -5.00.

As with **media diversity**, the situation surrounding **responsibility of media actors** was assessed by experts to be in crisis (-2.92; in 2022 it was -2.81). The indicator *independent media policy* demonstrated the greatest negative trend - it saw a 0.81 point drop (from -2.09 in 2022 to -2.90 in 2023). The most positive change was observed for *inclusiveness of publications and topics*, which went from -2.40 in 2022 to -1.50 in 2023.

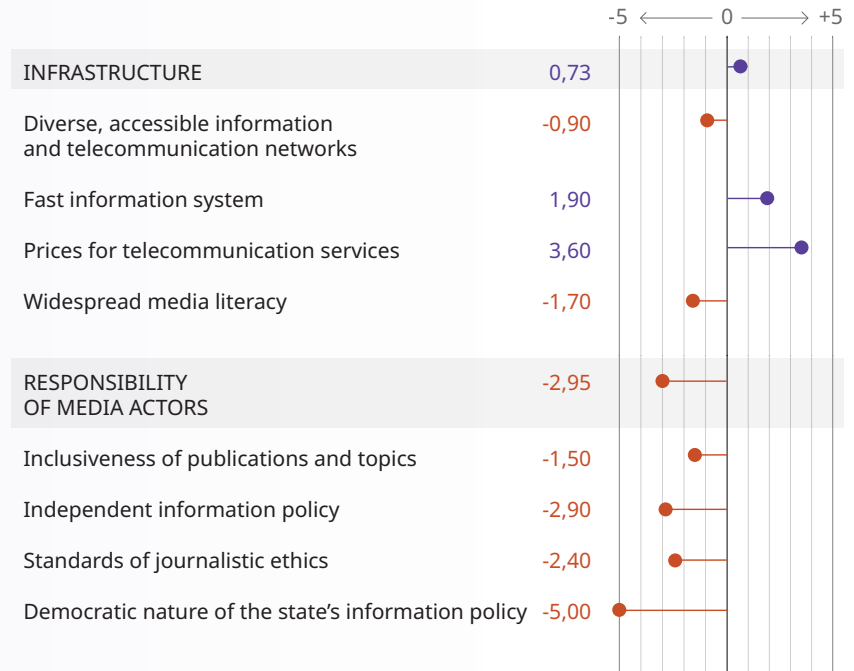




The only area in the information sphere that received a positive rating was **media infrastructure** (0.73, in 2022 it was 0.64). Like last year, high positive rankings were given to *fast information system* (1.90; in 2022 it was 1.82) and *prices for telecommunications services* (3.60, compared to 3.21 in 2022; this was the indicator that received the highest rating among all the Index's indicators, and it represents an insignificant improvement on last year).

In terms of year-on-year change, the indicators that saw the greatest movement were *diverse, accessible information and telecommunication networks* (+1.10) and support for *domestic media outlets* (+1.05). The most negative change was for *(in-)dependent information policy* (-0.81) and *absence of ideological barriers* (-0.72).

We would also like to point out that this was the only wave of the Index that had 2 indicators with absolute minimum evaluations: *de-monopolized media space* and *democratic nature of the state's information policy*.





ECONOMIC SPHERE

Whereas last year this sphere saw the greatest downturn in expert assessments (-0.98), in 2023 it exhibited the greatest improvement: of 0.48 points. Although it must be said that this change is insignificant as the sphere's indicators all remain in the crisis zone.

The greatest improvements were observed in the areas **economic base** and **resources for development** of the Belarusian economy. Evaluations in these areas had decreased the most in the year prior (which allowed **resources for development** to go from "critical" to merely "crisis.")

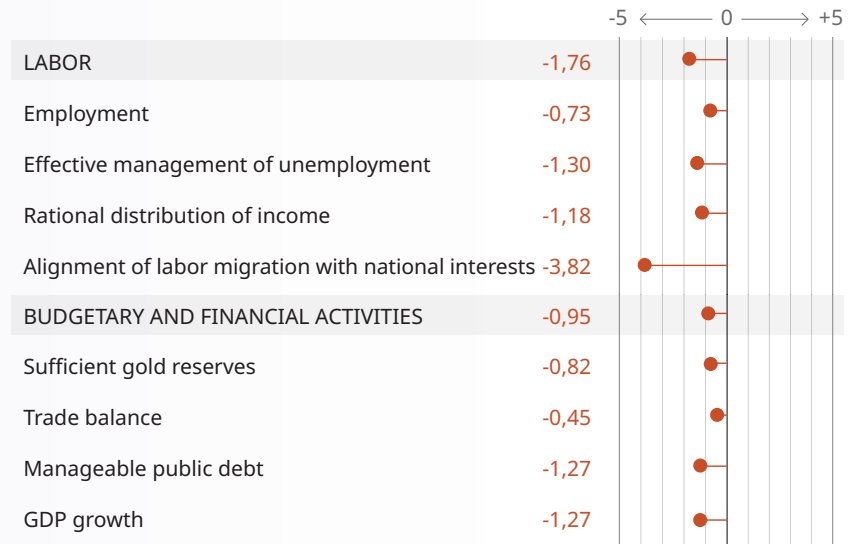
Although both of these areas were still deemed to be in a state of crisis, their indicators nevertheless showed improvement. *Sectoral economic policy* showed the greatest improvement (+1.08: from -2.44 in 2022 to -1.36 in 2023), as did *favourable investment climate* (+0.99), which moved from a state of near-collapse to into the less negative critical zone (from -4.44 in 2022 to -3.45 in 2023). Experts explain the improvements in these indicators by pointing to a less competitive market, which benefits certain businesses, particularly Russian ones.





GDP growth was the indicator that demonstrated the greatest improvement, gaining +2.51 points on last year (-2.27 in 2023 compared to -3.78 in 2022). The only indicators in the economic sphere where evaluations got lower were trade balance and manageable public debt (-1.12 and -0.94 points respectively). All three of these indicators, whose year-on-year results varied greatly, fall under the **budgetary and financial activities** area, which makes this area the most ambivalent in the economic sphere. Nevertheless, positive changes ensured that this area shifted from a state of crisis to stagnation.

Evaluations for the area **labour** demonstrate little change from year to year; in 2023 the RI here was -1.76; in 2022 it was -2.06, and in 2021 it was -1.83. Within this area, the most dynamic indicator was *employment*, where evaluations grew by 0.71 points (from -1.44 in 2022 to -1.76 in 2023). Such change is unsurprising, given how much of the work force has emigrated abroad. Correspondingly, the indicator *alignment of labour migration with national interests*, which experts gave -3.82 points, was the most negatively rated indicator in the entire economic sphere.





SOCIAL SPHERE

Like last year, the social sphere received the highest expert evaluations. Nevertheless, it still remains in a crisis zone (RI= -1.28; in 2022 it was -1.31 and in 2021 it was -0.87).

Unlike last year, when public organizations received the worst evaluations, in 2023 experts gave the worst ratings to the area **relations between society and the state** (-3.65, compared to -2.80 in 2022), putting it in the critical zone. According to experts, participation in political life is collapsing (-4.30), whereas trust in political institutions, participation in the initiatives of states bodies, and support for public policy are in a critical condition (-3,36, -3,50 and -3,42 points respectively).

The state of affairs of **public organizations** in the country was also assessed as being in a critical situation (-3.02, compared to -3.10 in 2022). In this area, the *indicator diverse and developed public organizations* was in a state of collapse (-4.21), whereas the *inclusiveness of public organizations* and *regional distribution of public organizations* continued to be in critical condition (-3.85 and -3.10).



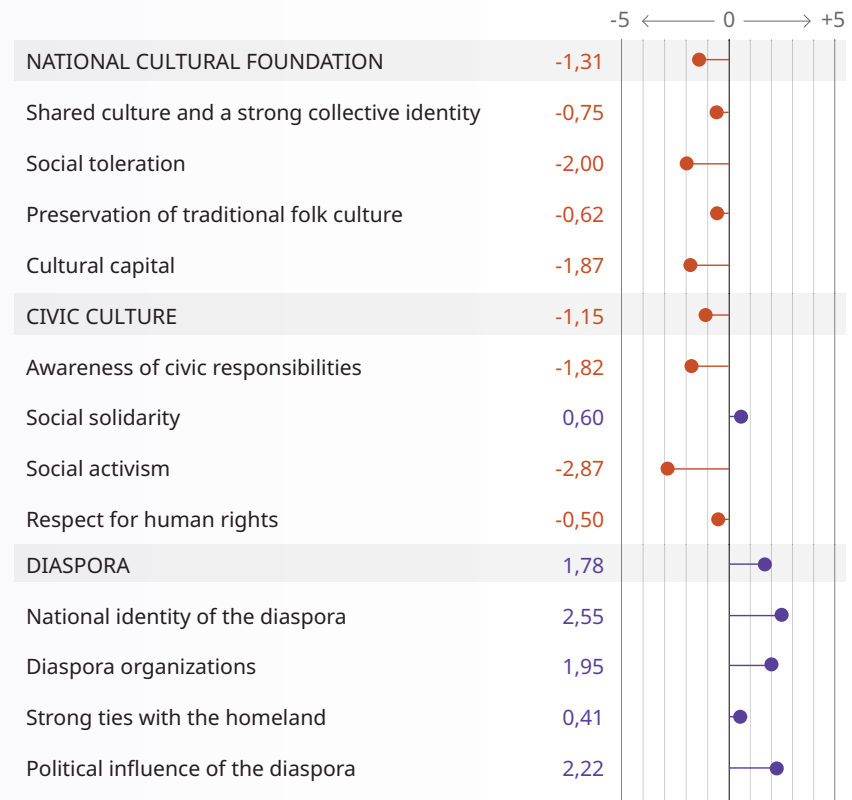


The area national **cultural foundation** and **civic culture** remain in a state of crisis (-1.31 and -1.13 points respectively).

In the first case, the *social tolerance* and *cultural capital* of the country's population are in a relatively more difficult position (-2.00 and -1.87 points, respectively). In the second – *social activism* and *awareness of civic responsibilities* (-2.87 and -1.82 points, respectively) fared the worst.

As before, the only area that continues to receive positive points is the **diaspora** (+1.78 vs. +2.00 in 2022 and +2.08 in 2021). Indicators such as national identity of the diaspora (2.55 vs. 2.50 in 2023) and the political influence of the diaspora (+2.22 vs. 1.90 in 2022) received high positive ratings.

In terms of trends, several indicators improved their positions despite an overall negative outlook: *cultural capital* (+0.83) and the *regional distribution of public organizations* (+0.80) improved slightly; *participation in initiatives of state bodies* and *support for public policy* experience the greatest downturns (-1.40 and -1.12, respectively).



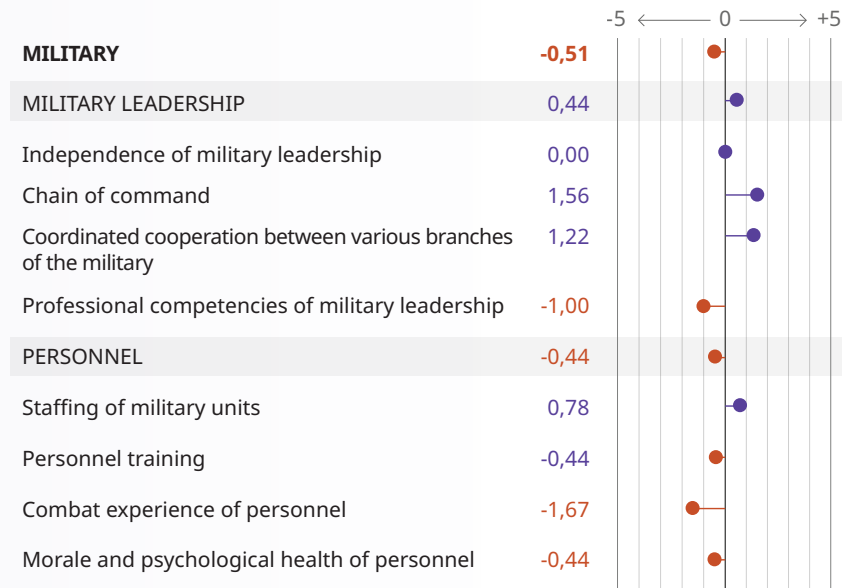


MILITARY SPHERE

Expert assessments of the military sphere in 2023 differed slightly from last year, although they have generally tended to get worse (IR = -0.51; in 2022 – -0.30). At the same time, things are better here than in any other major sphere covered by the Index.

Experts rated **military leadership** highly. This area was evaluated positively (the only one in the military sphere), receiving 0.44 points. However, this score is 0.68 points lower than last year. This decrease is caused by a downturn in three out of the area's four indicators: *chain of command* (-1.55 points), *independence of military leadership* (-1.44 points), and *coordinated cooperation between various branches of the military* (-0.16 points).

Evaluations for areas such as **personnel** and **the army** are in the negative half of the stagnation zone (-0.44 and -0.78 points respectively), which hardly differs from their positions last year (-0.50 and -0.72 points respectively).

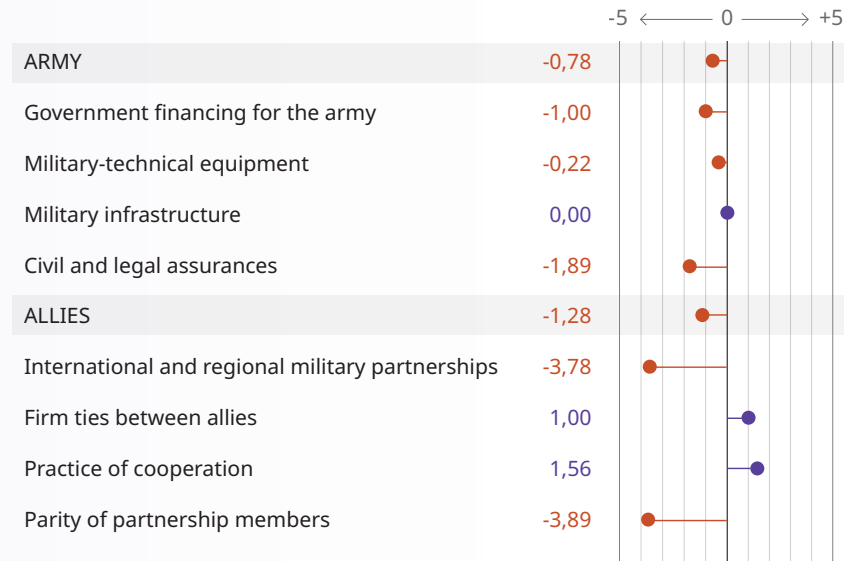




In the first area, the lowest rated indicator was the lack of *combat experience of personnel* (-1.67 points). Nevertheless, compared to last year, evaluations in this area grew by 1.22 points. In the second area (the army), the most problematic indicator was *civil and legal assurances* (-1.89).

The lowest ratings in the military sphere went to the area **Allies**. And whereas the area itself was deemed to be in crisis, some of its indicators received a “critical” assessment. This is true of *international and military regional partnerships* (-3.78 vs -3.33 in 2022) and *parity of partnership members* (-3,89 vs -3,88 in 2022). At the same time, *the firm ties between allies* and *practice of cooperation* indicators receive ratings above zero (1.00 and 1.56, respectively).

This year, as in 2022, the indicators of the military sphere of the Resilience Index were not factored in when calculating the country-wide RI. One of the reasons for this was the limited number of public experts in this field.





CONCLUSIONS

During our research, we interviewed 45 Belarusian experts to assess the resilience of five spheres of Belarusian society: the political, economic, social, information, and military spheres. The main objective of the Index is to determine the pain points of Belarus as a complex system, as well as the spheres in which it is most resilient (capable of overcoming crises, adapting to their consequences, and evolving).

Compared to last year, we recorded an insignificant improvement in the economic sphere (+0.48), although the sphere continues to be in a state of crisis. Experts noted the increasingly top-down methods of economic governance and a further strengthening of the state sector's monopoly. Increased dependence on Russia as a trading partner is an ongoing trend; this represents an obstacle to the diversification of the export market. With the growth of economic dependence on Russia, Russia's economic risks become the risks of Belarus, which increases the country's isolation from the world economy. In this context, the state of the investment climate in Belarus, which is maintained through administrative methods, impedes the development of innovative sectors of the economy. The experts also emphasized the crisis state of private businesses due to the mass emigration of individuals with higher education. At the same time, unemployment in the country is dealt with by mandating forced labour and applying other interventionist mechanisms, rather than implementing labour market infrastructure reforms (unemployment benefits, re-training, etc.). Experts describe the practices of regulatory interventionism in the country as a *"return to serfdom"*. This policy makes it possible to maintain employment indicators and explains the growth of experts' assessments for the labour indicator (+0.71).

The political sphere, as in the two previous waves of the Resilience Index, is in the most difficult position (-2.40). Domestic policy was one of the lowest rated areas in the entire RI (-4.26). Experts attribute the crisis state of the Belarusian political sphere to ongoing, expanding repression, increasing political dependence on Russia, and politicization of state institutions. Under these conditions, even loyalty to the current political elites does not always guarantee citizens' protection. The judicial system is not independent and is totally politicized, which calls into question the possibility of citizens to exercise their rights to a fair trial. Security guarantees for citizens are not provided by law enforcement agencies either. Given the politicization of the police and the reorganization of their main functions, police officers are more likely to pose a threat to the population than ensure their safety. In 2023, Belarusian diplomatic missions abroad partially refused to serve their citizens. Embassies have stopped replacing passports and issuing other documents in foreign countries. Belarusians can no longer rely on the protection and assistance of consulates abroad. Any external political relations the Belarusian authorities once had have narrowed even more due to the active involvement of Belarus's military infrastructure in supporting Russia's army and private military companies. Over



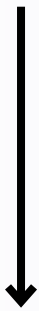
the past year, the Belarusian regime has been building ties with undemocratic countries within the CIS, the CSTO, the SCO, and the EAEU. Strengthening cooperation with undemocratic, corrupt states worsens the image of Belarus in the international arena. In contrast, experts note that the Office of Svetlana Tikhanovskaya actively pursues diplomatic relations with democratic countries. This underlines the difference in the foreign policy positions of the pro-democratic community and the authorities in Belarus.

In the information sphere, expert assessments are among the lowest. The lowest indicator in the entire RI is in the information sphere (*environment for media work*: -4.43). Due to repressive policies towards the independent media, media outlets in Belarus can only continue their activities if they demonstrate loyalty to the political elites and/or avoid political reporting. State-owned media have a *carte blanche* to cover political events, although their journalistic ethics are extremely dubious. Interestingly, expert evaluations improved this year for some indicators in this sphere. This can be explained by the fact that the boundaries of the scale have expanded in the negative direction. Labelling media outlets extremist has become routine for Belarusian authorities, jeopardizing citizens' freedom to choose sources of information, not to mention putting them in danger. On the one hand, experts point to the well developed infrastructure in Belarus: there is a high level of access to the internet, telecommunications services, and operators. However, in practice, internet providers' obligations to transfer personal user information to the authorities, as well as the censorship of certain topics and media personalities, prevent the media market from developing or even maintaining the status quo. Experts emphasize that whereas earlier censorship mostly affected media outlets, today the entire internet is censored: the *government has committed to a policy of "intimidating internet users at the safe level."* The state's monopoly on the media leads to other long-term consequences - forced consumption of propaganda or Russian content by the majority of citizens, or clandestine consumption of independent media content. An important limitation on the work of the independent media is

access to information that requires accreditation (which independent journalists have lost), as well as access to reporting subjects within Belarus. Experts emphasize that the only competition in the media market originates not from demand by media consumers, but rather from political elites, *"the editorial offices of various state media outlets regularly inform on each other in an attempt to appear more ideologically correct and win a bigger allocation of budget funds."*

Expert evaluations of the military sphere dropped by -0.51 points this year, although it still remains one of the most resilient. The main reason for experts' quantitative and qualitative downgrading of this sphere was the growing dependence of Belarus's military on Russia. The military alliance with Russia, instead of providing security guarantees, does just the opposite. Although formally the Armed Forces of Belarus are subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief, real power lies with a third party — the Russian Federation. Experts note that although the military training of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus has improved, the army has trouble retaining officers. Furthermore, the defence budget was doubled in 2023, but there is no open information about how it was allocated. Joint military exercises with Russia continue, although they are less frequent than last year. The experts noted the army's lack of resources, both material and human. They also underlined the prevailing Soviet-style management model. The rights of service people are not guaranteed by the Belarusian armed forces. Given the politicization of the military's main tasks (suppress protests, protect the political leadership), experts expressed doubts about the readiness of military personnel to carry out any real military orders.

In this wave of the Index, the social sphere remained in crisis (-1.28). Experts attribute the exacerbation of this crisis to the ideological confrontation of the country's "two mass cultures" whose boundaries were delineated by the events of 2020. In addition, there are more divisions within these two camps, such as between "those who left" and "those who remained" or those who are "for" or "against" the war.



The authorities stoke polarization and the growing socio-political conflict through hostility and aggressive repression of any opponents: *“the regime is working to divide society and rid the country of politically objectionable elements; there is no way for civil society in Belarus to effectively counteract this .”* The Russification of education and culture goes hand in hand with the increasingly ideological nature of education at all levels. The authorities continue to liquidate civil society organisations, employing a policy of recognising NGOs as extremist. Nevertheless, organizations that have relocated abroad continue their activities and strive to maintain contact with Belarusians within the country. Niche, targeted civil society organizations are emerging within the country, aimed at achieving specific non-political goals related to ecology and urban infrastructure. At the same time, public organizations in Belarus have become almost completely isolated from international institutions. However, according to experts, this does not make civil society more stable. Experts note that despite the relocation of civil society organizations and the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Belarusians, solidarity and activity related to the Belarusian agenda remains at a high level. Furthermore, experts emphasize the high level of interest in politics among representatives of the diaspora, which they attribute to emigrants’ newly acquired freedom of expression and political opinion. Unlike the last wave of the Index, experts remarked on the growth of more radical organizations, which have a more military orientation and employ non-inclusive political rhetoric and identity markers (norms and vision of the future), which is different from the first waves of Belarusian emigration.

Belarus is still in a state of crisis, which is underscored by the expert assessments of the 2023 Resilience Index. The crisis’s main contributing factors remain political pressure on any manifestations of dissent, support for and involvement in Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine, and increased economic and energy dependence on Russia. This year, experts also noted new challenges affecting Belarus’s further development – excessive, interventionist regulation of the labour market

and the exchange rate, the refusal of the Belarusian authorities to provide diplomatic services to citizens living abroad, and active obstruction of the dissemination of any information through channels not controlled by the authorities. The improvement of quantitative evaluations of several individual indicators was thanks to administrative regulation; however, in their qualitative assessments experts emphasized new factors that could lead to a long-term deterioration of all spheres of society.

To sum up, as a multifaceted system Belarus cannot be characterised as resilient. The results of the Resilience Index show that in all spheres, the system is in a calamitous state of crisis — or at best is stagnating. The main factor influencing these results has been the political crisis: the system has been unable to overcome this stress test in the political sphere. This illustrates how the effects of a crisis in one sphere are not confined to one part of the system, but instead influence the whole, weakening it and reducing its ability to develop and improve. In this context, it is important to remember that systems in authoritarian regimes depend on the actions of a small group of people; unlike for democracies, large numbers of actors cannot engage in its development and improvement. The distribution of responsibilities among various actors — such as public organizations, initiatives, and other representatives of civil society — strengthens a system.

This project has demonstrated the heuristic value of our index, which will further grow in new iterations. This will allow patterns and change to be tracked — at the country, sphere, and other levels. Based on the Index’s insights, experts and politicians implementing reforms can plan the development of individual spheres and areas more effectively. Particular attention can be paid to those positions that experts rated highly — these are potential buttresses or zones of growth for the country as a system. Up-to-date facts can be useful for political actors, analysts, and researchers wishing to identify the most problematic aspects of Belarusian society that most urgently need reform.



METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the *Belarus Resilience Index* is based on our original combination and adaptation of two classic social science approaches: structural functionalism and the sphere paradigm (Shavel, 2018), enhanced by our indexation of resilience.

Our understanding of the research subject—the Republic of Belarus — as a complex, aggregated (mega-) system stems from **structural functionalism**. We proceed from the assumption that any system strives to overcome external and internal dysfunctions, and each element of the system (or sub-system) makes some contribution to its general sustainability. Practice shows that no social system — nor any sub-system — can remain in a state of perfect equilibrium. That said, when systems (or sub-systems) interact with each other, a certain dynamic sustainability emerges that causes the systems themselves to evolve.

Thus, we have focused our attention on resilience as a characteristic of a system that determines its ability to retain its authenticity and evolve by overcoming various stresses and crises.

This ability is described as “resilience” in the modern Western tradition.

Resilience is a concept that captures the ability of a system to effectively handle external challenges and internal crises. It is a combination of sustainability, flexibility, and preparedness for internal and external stresses. In our case, we used the City Resilience Index and the concept of resilience set forth by Judith Rodin as standard models (*Rodin, Judith (2014), The Resilience Dividend. Being Strong in a World Where Things Go Wrong*).

Any society is an extremely complex system (metasystem) that is difficult to evaluate as a whole. Therefore, we applied the methods proposed by the **sphere paradigm**, which entails singling out several spheres for the Index to focus on. This means that the values assigned to individual spheres should be seen as more salient than the general indicator of the Resilience Index on the country level.

We chose the following main spheres:



THE ECONOMIC SPHERE

covering industry and the distribution of the country's resources (both tangible and intangible)



THE POLITICAL SPHERE

which refers to the relations between various subjects and the authorities



THE SOCIAL SPHERE

covering the conception and affirmation of supra-individual phenomena and actors comprising groups of people



THE INFORMATION SPHERE

where semantic content is created, transmitted, and re-transmitted



Four is a relatively conventional number of spheres in the humanities. The **political** and **economic spheres** are generally accepted segments of societal systems. Allocating a **social sphere** is also conventional. Following this model, the fourth position usually goes to the **cultural sphere**, which is understood as a space for cultural production, assimilation, and the transmission of its results. We excluded this sphere due to the vagueness of the concept of “culture” and our need to be concrete with regards to each of the spheres we analyzed. As a result, we decided on the **information sphere** as our fourth category. This concept corresponds functionally to the idea of “culture” and is one of the most strategically important factors in social dynamics.

45 experts took part in the survey. The expert pool consists of leading analysts in the relevant fields. When selecting experts, we were guided by their professional interests, as expressed in comments to the media, their research, and affiliation with relevant organizations. We wanted survey participants to cover a wide range of professional backgrounds (for example, in the information sphere, we sought out journalists as well as media experts and analysts). All of the experts interviewed were outside Belarus at the time of the survey. We included both experts who have participated in our survey before and about 10 new experts. This fact can be considered a limitation of the sample and should be taken into account when reading the results. However, each of the interviewed experts, despite having emigrated, continues to work on the topic of Belarus in one of the designated

areas. Furthermore, not all experts work publicly, which is especially pertinent to the military sphere; therefore, as in previous waves of research, we have decided to guarantee experts’ anonymity.

When evaluating each of the spheres, experts were asked to assess the indicators in each area, based on a scale of resilience (from -5 to +5), and evaluate the situation for each indicator in relation to an ideal state as formulated by the authors of the index. For example, when assessing the indicator “effective, independent, and impartial justice mechanisms”, experts compare the indicator, which is worded to reflect an ideal state (+5), with real life. A full explanation of the Index’s indicators can be found in the appendix. In addition to evaluating each indicator in their sphere, experts had the opportunity to leave comments explaining their assessment. These comments were taken into account by the authors of the RI when writing this text. It is important to note that before filling out the questionnaire, we asked experts to fill in only the section that relates to their area of expertise; however, some respondents assessed other areas that were not core to them. When calculating the average score for indicators and areas, only the opinions of subject-matter experts were taken into account. However, we also carried out an alternative calculation that includes the evaluations of non-core experts.



STRUCTURE OF THE BELARUS RESILIENCE INDEX

Last year, we divided the Belarusian system into four spheres, 18 areas, and 77 indicators. This year, we added the military sphere, which contains four areas and 16 indicators. As a result, we now have five sphere, 22 areas, and 83 indicators in total.

Each sphere consists of four areas, which are relevant for the resilience of both the entire system and individual spheres. Each area was assessed using four or five indicators. The names of the indicators and their explanations are prescriptive—they represent ideal states of the structural elements of a system, facilitating its resilience and development.

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO RESILIENCE

- *diversity, development, openness, and flexibility, which make a system highly adaptable and allow it to overcome challenges and crises.*

FACTORS THAT HINDER RESILIENCE

- *monopolization, homogeneity, and the conservation of the status quo, which makes systems fragile and sensitive to stresses and shocks.*

The index was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the scores provided by the experts who participated in our study. The experts' rating procedure involved comparing the actual state of affairs with an ideal one on an 11-point scale, where the *intervals* were determined as follows:

- *from -5 to -4* – collapse or near collapse
- *from -3.99 to 3* – critical condition
- *from -2.99 to -1.00* – crisis
- *from -0.99 to +0.99* – stagnation
- *from +1 to +2.99* – stable situation with some growth
- *from +3 to +3.99* – sustainable growth (prevailing growth)
- *from +4 to +5* – general systemic progress

We would also like to address how we interpreted change in the indicators from 2021 to 2022. When comparing ratings determined by experts for various spheres in 2021 and 2022, the difference in scores was interpreted as follows:

- a difference in ratings of 0.5 or less was deemed non-existent;
- a difference of 0.5 to 1.0 was deemed insignificant;
- a difference of 1.1 to 2.0 was deemed significant;
- a difference of 2.1 or more was deemed fundamental.

In total, 45 experts took part in our survey; there were nine to 11 experts per sphere (several people were experts for multiple spheres). Practically all experts are currently located outside Belarus, which may have influenced the scores they provided.



In general, resilience can be defined as the ability of a system to respond to crises through preparation, risk management, and adaptation to the conditions that emerge.

Resilience is the ability of any system (individual, social, or organizations) to prepare for failures brought about by crises, recover after shocks or stresses, and adapt to new circumstances, drawing on lessons from past experience. This concept of dynamic sustainability is relevant to many fields: it can be used to analyze countries, regions, ecosystems, industry, architecture, etc. In this study, we aimed to holistically analyze the resilience of Belarus—a system comprising an entire country.

To do so, we propose an expanded methodology that factors in political polarization, the enhanced role of individual actors, and the agency of certain groups that, prior to the political crisis, had not been decisive stakeholders capable of affecting the country's sustainability. Thus, our Resilience Index incorporates the political, social, and economic realities specific to Belarus, thereby avoiding the risk of adapting the concept of resilience wholesale from fields like climate science or engineering.

The point of our resilience analysis is to expand the tools for growth available to Belarus in its new environment: the crisis can be seen as an opportunity to

strengthen the Belarusian system, forging new and unexpected connections and exploring paths to development. In other words, we are looking to create a resilience dividend.

A resilient system is dynamic: it is built on preparedness, responsibility, and the activation of its dormant elements. Such a system entails cooperation between formal and informal actors, as well as various technologies and tools. There are four stages to the development of a resilient system: rapid growth, conservation, release caused by reaching some threshold (collapse/crisis), and then reorganization/adaptation (Rodin, 2014). In order to analyze a system's disadvantages and subsequently strengthen it, feedback from the system's participants must be obtained. Often, structural factors (limited educational opportunities or high unemployment) can influence concrete phenomena (such as the crime rate); thus, in order to solve seemingly surface-level problems, stakeholders must work with the system's structure as a whole.



The concept of resilience underlies the development of international documents, political programs, and academic conferences. Resilience refers to the ability of systems to react to crises through preparation, risk management, and adaptation to the new conditions that arise.

The concept of resilience was widely applied after the 9/11 terrorist attacks; however, besides the framework's ability to help prevent terrorism and restore systems after such incidents, resilience has started being applied to other fields as well (Borovikova, May 2018). The resilience framework is being applied with particular success to the study of the climate and natural disasters. In recent years, the concept has been used in fields as varied as politics, education, energy, and cyberspace.

Resilience is the ability of any system (individual, social, or an organization) to prepare for failures brought about by crises, recover after shocks or stresses, and adapt to new circumstances, drawing on lessons from past experience. The concept of dynamic sustainability is relevant to many fields; it can be used to analyze countries, regions, ecosystems, industry, architecture, etc.

A resilient system has five main characteristics: awareness, diversity, integration, self-regulation, and adaptation (Rodin, J. 2014).

1. AWARENESS

describes cognizance of strengths and weaknesses, as well as the desire and ability to update information, re-evaluating and monitoring changing situations.

2. DIVERSITY

means that a multitude of different individuals, approaches, and scenarios should play a positive role in preparing a system for future crises. Critical functions should not all be performed by a single element of the system.

3. INTEGRATION

entails transparent communication between subjects, encouraging coordinated and effective decisions. It is important for the system to be simultaneously diverse and coherent. Diversity allows for various opinions and alternatives that strengthen the system. Meanwhile, systemic integration is vital for the coordination of ideas and actors, which allows goals to be achieved more effectively.

4. SELF-REGULATION

means that a breakdown does not lead to a crisis, as the system is prepared and can “safely fail.”

5. ADAPTATION

is the ability of a system to evolve and change in a given situation, managing to return to its pre-crisis condition. A sustainable system is not one that has achieved permanent stability, but rather one that focuses on adapting to crises and failures.

It is also important to understand that the resilience of one object (person, city, or country) can negatively affect the resilience of another object. Therefore, to assess Belarus as a whole country—as a system being evaluated for resilience—we propose an expanded methodological approach that takes into account political polarization, the heightened role of particular actors, and the agency of groups that had not been decisive stakeholders influencing resilience before the political crisis.

Thus, our Resilience Index considers the political, social, and economic realities of Belarus while avoiding the risks of adapting the concept of resilience wholesale from fields like engineering or climate science.

The point of building a resilient system is not to make the country completely stable and unchanging, but rather to expand the development tools available to it in new situations, thereby turning crises into opportunities to strengthen the system. When building a resilient system, new and unexpected connections, opportunities, and development paths can be found. This has been termed the resilience dividend.

A resilient system is dynamic: it is built on preparedness, responsibility, and the activation of its dormant elements. Such a system entails cooperation between formal and informal actors, as well as various technologies and tools. There are four stages to the development of a resilient system: rapid growth, conservation, release caused by approaching a threshold (collapse/crisis), and then reorganization/adaptation. In order to analyze a system's disadvantages and subsequently strengthen it, obtaining feedback from the system's participants is crucial. Often, structural factors (limited educational opportunities or high unemployment) can influence concrete phenomena (such as the crime rate). Thus, in order to resolve surface-level problems, it is necessary to work with the structure of the system as a whole. For example, it is unlikely that a country relying fully on technologies that harm the environment will be wealthy.



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ECONOMIC

AREA	INDICATOR	INDICATOR EXPLANATION
LABOR	Employment	Targeted policy of creating good conditions for job growth
	Effective management of unemployment	Inclusive labor policy with mechanisms for fostering the skills needed on the current and emerging labor market
	Rational distribution of income	Creation of conditions that stimulate reasonable income growth and its fair distribution
	Alignment of labor migration with national interests	Effective measures aimed at attracting and retaining highly educated and qualified personnel
ECONOMIC BASE	Diversification of foreign markets	Effective diversification of foreign markets to mitigate economic risks
	Regional distribution of production	Reasonable distribution of production throughout the country to achieve both an economic and social effect
	Sectoral economic policy	Analysis of indicators in various industries with a primary focus on the most promising sectors
	Equitable conditions for all forms of business	Creation of an equitable and favorable environment for businesses of different forms and sizes: public, private, foreign; small, medium, and large.
BUDGETARY AND FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES	Sufficient gold reserves	Sufficient gold reserves to overcome potential crises
	Trade balance	Maintenance of a favorable (positive) trade balance
	Manageable public debt	Sufficient funds for servicing and/or reducing public debt
	GDP growth	Gradual and steady GDP growth
RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPMENT	Favorable investment climate	Favorable and consistently improving conditions for attracting domestic and foreign investment

AREA	INDICATOR	INDICATOR EXPLANATION
	Pursuit of high technology and innovation	Emphasis on high-tech and innovative industries
	Encouragement of private enterprise	Incentive system for fostering private enterprise at all levels
	Participation in international production chains	Integration of the country's economy into broader economic systems

POLITICAL

AREA	INDICATOR	INDICATOR EXPLANATION
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM	Effective coordination between state actors within the government	Comprehensive and flexible communication (including feedback) among various branches, levels, and actors within the government
	Rational decision-making processes	Transparent, inclusive, and comprehensive development of policies and strategies for government planning, decision-making, and policy execution.
	Mutual understanding between the authorities and various interest groups	The authorities consider the interests of various groups in the country (social, political, ethnic, etc.); there is inclusive and constructive cooperation among all actors involved in public decision-making
	Proactive collaboration	The state supports the development of civil society, seeking to include active-minded citizens and their organizations/associations in the development of the country at all levels
	Crisis monitoring and management	Comprehensive, high-quality state and independent monitoring of the situation in the country (economic, technological, ecological, etc.), allowing the state to manage emergencies holistically
LAW AND ORDER	Rule of law and human rights	Public order and security systems are based on respect for human rights; they are kept in check by laws
	Fair and accessible justice	Effective, independent, impartial justice mechanisms
	Competent and conscientious police force	The police conscientiously and effectively perform their duty to keep citizens safe.
	Active corruption prevention	Transparent and effective approach to combatting corruption in all spheres of life

AREA	INDICATOR	INDICATOR EXPLANATION
	Effective crime prevention and deterrence system	Comprehensive, cooperative, and strategic crime deterrence mechanisms
SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE	Effective social security system	Effective social security system for vulnerable groups
	Reliable healthcare system	Affordable, high-quality medical care for all groups (covering aspects ranging from sanitary control to ambulance services)
	High-quality and inclusive education	The education system inclusively provides the entire population with the objective, scientific knowledge necessary for personal development and social competence.
	Effective pension system	The pension system works reliably, ensuring a decent level of well-being for its participants.
	Developed, modern housing infrastructure	Well-maintained engineering systems; logistics, transport, telecommunications, and other infrastructure; stable operation of rapid response services of various types
DOMESTIC POLICY	Transparent and legitimate electoral processes	The government fulfils its obligations to ensure democratic, fair, and free elections
	Functioning separation of powers	The executive, judicial, and legislative branches function independently of one another
	Strong local government	The local authorities have enough autonomy to make independent decisions at their own level; they are afforded opportunities to influence political decision-making at higher levels
	Healthy political competition	Favorable environment for the development of political parties, organizations, and other actors in the political process
	Tolerance of the political activity of citizens	Citizens' political activity is valued by the state, which actively fosters civic education and encourages political involvement
FOREIGN POLICY	Friendly relations with other countries	Developed network of diplomatic missions, absence of diplomatic scandals
	Improvements to the country's image	Purposeful attempts by the authorities to improve the country's image abroad through broad political, economic, cultural, sporting, and other global ties.

AREA	INDICATOR	INDICATOR EXPLANATION
	Support for citizens abroad	Systematic cooperation with Belarusians abroad; friendly and long-term relations with representatives of the diaspora
	Contribution to the activities of international organizations and associations	Transparent and mutually beneficial relations with a wide range of foreign policy partners in supranational and international associations
	Emphasis on good-neighborliness	Unequivocal respect for sovereignty and respect for neighboring countries

SOCIAL

AREA	INDICATOR	INDICATOR EXPLANATION
NATIONAL CULTURAL FOUNDATION	Shared culture and a strong collective identity	Existence of a collective consciousness and culture that most of the country's inhabitants identify with
	Social toleration	Mutual acceptance of different groups (linguistic, national, religious, etc.)
	Preservation of traditional folk culture	Popularization of various elements of traditional culture (cuisine, handicrafts, clothing, etc.)
	Cultural capital	Familiarity with classical elements of world culture and modern trends: theaters, museums, exhibitions, etc.
PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS	Diverse and developed public organizations	Effectively functioning public organizations of various types (territorial, professional, human rights, ecological, religious, etc.)
	Regional distribution of public organizations	Public organizations cover all regions of the country
	Inclusiveness of public organizations	All population groups are represented by public organizations, which seek to resolve their problems and defend their rights
	International activities of public organizations (NGOs and GONGOs)	Public organizations participate in the activities of a wide range of foreign and international organizations

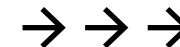
AREA	INDICATOR	INDICATOR EXPLANATION
CIVIC CULTURE	Awareness of civic responsibilities	People understand and accept their duties as citizens; they take responsibility for what's happening in the country
	Social solidarity	Solidarity and mutual aid at the neighborhood, territorial, professional, and other levels
	Social activism	Citizens actively participate in public life; they express their opinions and take part in solving social problems.
	Respect for human rights	Understanding of the importance of human rights, respect for them as common and personal values
RELATIONS BETWEEN SOCIETY AND THE STATE	Participation in political life	Active participation of citizens in the political life of the country
	Trust in public institutions	Trust of citizens in governance structures and agencies that uphold public order
	Participation in the initiatives of state bodies	Most citizens take part in events or initiatives instigated by the authorities in some way.
	Support for public policy	As a whole, society supports the government's policies
DIASPORA	National identity of the diaspora	Developed national and civic consciousness of the diaspora
	Diaspora organizations	A developed network of institutional and informal organizations connecting Belarusians abroad with each other and with their homeland
	Strong ties with the homeland	Maintenance of regular, productive ties with the homeland; active support for the homeland
	Political influence of the diaspora	Sufficient skills and resources to lobby for the country's interests abroad

INFORMATION

AREA	INDICATOR	INDICATOR EXPLANATION
INFRASTRUCTURE	Diverse, accessible information and telecommunication networks	Diverse and competitive systems that ensure the distribution of telecommunication services throughout the country.



AREA	INDICATOR	INDICATOR EXPLANATION
	Fast information system	Up-to-date information can be rapidly dispersed (the vast majority of the country is covered by television and radio signals, broadband internet, and postal services)
	Prices for telecommunication services	Affordable prices for telecommunication services
	Widespread media literacy	Inclusive efforts to raise awareness in society of the risks and opportunities of using various sources of information (“media security”)
FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT FOR MEDIA WORK	Safety for journalists	Opportunities for unhindered and safe journalistic work
	Absence of legal barriers	Independent media outlets can be registered; they can function freely within the bounds of the law
	Absence of technical barriers	Absence of artificial technological barriers: access to printing houses, telecommunication networks, and TV/radio stations
	Absence of ideological barriers	The activities of the media are not subject to ideologically motivated censorship from the government
MEDIA DIVERSITY	Multi-level media sources	Developed network of national, regional, and local media
	De-monopolized media space	Accessibility and equal conditions for various types of media: state-owned and private, pro-regime and oppositional
	Media openness	Opportunities for foreign and international media to work freely in the country
	Support for domestic media outlets	The government actively supports domestic media outlets
RESPONSIBILITY OF MEDIA ACTORS	Inclusiveness of publications and topics	The media represent and defend the interests of various social groups and societal strata.
	Independent information policy	The media can apply their own independent information policy
	Standards of journalistic ethics	The media generally conduct their work properly, on the basis of mutual respect
	Democratic nature of the state’s information policy	The information policy of the state aims to ensure free access to information, equitable conditions for the media, and the support and protection of public interests in the information field



MILITARY

AREA	INDICATOR	INDICATOR EXPLANATION
MILITARY LEADERSHIP	Independence of military leadership	Subordination of the army to a commander in chief, rather than a third party or country
	Chain of command	A chain of command that entails a hierarchical subordination of military units and command divisions; independence of actions
	Coordinated cooperation between various branches of the military	Skills and resources to jointly carry out missions using various types of troops
	Professional competencies of military leadership	Knowledge, skills, and know-how of various levels of command, ensuring the needs and challenges of modern warfare can be met
PERSONNEL	Staffing of military units	Sufficient military and paramilitary personnel
	Personnel training	Sufficient knowledge and know-how to perform combat missions
	Combat experience of personnel	Combat experience that corresponds to the capabilities of the military to take part in armed conflict
	Morale and psychological health of personnel	Readiness and ability of soldiers and officers to consciously, actively, and responsibly fulfil their duty in peacetime, as well as to carry out missions in wartime
ARMY	Government financing for the army	A military budget that is large enough to ensure a functioning army
	Military-technical equipment	Provision of combat vehicles, weapons, and ammunition (including modern weapons and communications equipment)
	Military infrastructure	Interconnected logistical, medical, inventory, and other systems
	Civil and legal assurances	A system of control over the functioning of the military system, mechanisms for upholding the rights of service people and counteracting corruption and hazing



AREA	INDICATOR	INDICATOR EXPLANATION
ALLIES	International and regional military partnerships	Participation in military partnerships that improve the country's security
	Firm ties between allies	Similar systems of management; unified systems of defense and military standards
	Practice of cooperation	Adequate experience conducting joint military exercises and/or operations
	Parity of partnership members	Equal participation of allies in decision-making during both wartime and peacetime

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