

The topic of the ongoing migration crisis on the EU-Belarus border which peaked in November 2021 and continues as of today has hit the headlines of many international media. In response to the EU sanctions and suspension of high-level political contacts, the Belarusian regime facilitated the arrival of thousands of foreigners, often families with little kids, to its territory and instigated their attempts to cross the border with the EU. Thanks to it Minsk expected to obtain certain concessions from the neighbouring EU countries and the EU as whole. The border crisis was extreme but arguably one of many forms of the use of migration by the Belarusian regime as means to obtain material and nonmaterial gains in diplomatic relations vis-à-vis the EU.

A purposeful use of migration by countries to attain foreign policy goals, often from mightier states, is not a rare occurrence in modern history. Within her concept of coercive engineered migration Prof. Greenhill identified 64 cases of similar coercive actions, or at least threats of such actions, by state actors between 1951 and 2006. In the past few years, a growing number of academic publications looked at the nexus between foreign and migration policies using the framework of migration diplomacy which was conceptualised and theorised as an object of research by scholars Fiona Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas.

Despite closer academic attention lately, the interplay between foreign and migration policies, particularly in authoritarian regimes, continues to be understudied. And the Belarusian case remains largely overlooked by political scientists despite being quite outstanding, including for the reason of tremendous changes that Belarus's diplomatic relations with the EU and its migration policies have undergone in a fairly short period of time.

The research project will focus on Belarus' use of migration to achieve material and symbolic gains in diplomatic relations with the EU in 2013-2023. The year of 2013 is proposed as a starting point to mark the beginning of thaw in EU-Belarus relations against the background of quickly growing tensions between Russia and Ukraine. The then improved ties between the EU and Belarus coincided with the beginning negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements. In the following years Minsk maintained a largely cooperative approach in relations with the EU including in the migration sphere. The situation changed dramatically after the 2020 rigged presidential elections in Belarus and large-scale post-election repressions which brought a historical low in EU-Belarus relations. The period after 2020 has been characterised by a coercive type of Belarus's migration diplomacy vis-à-vis the EU, of which the migration crisis was the most widely-known manifestation.

The research among other things will be based on a series of semi-structured interviews with policymakers, researchers, and representatives of international and non-governmental organisations who have professionally dealt with the issues of Belarusian migration politics and EU-Belarus relations. The project will contribute to the migration diplomacy research field which lies at the intersection of international relations and migration studies. It will also advance an academic debate on the link between evolution of authoritarian regimes and their migration politics. Two scientific publications will be submitted to peer-reviewed journals in the areas of international relations, political science and the study of migration.