



The BIPART team thanks you for your cooperation and wishes you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! All the best in 2024!

We also present to you the summarizing digest of the outcomes of the outgoing year. This digest highlights the most significant and resonant news and events in the sphere of Belarusian public administration in 2023.

In general, in 2023, the state apparatus focused on strengthening the existing political regime in Belarus. At the same time, the character of public decision-making can be characterized as a reactionary one. It provided a somewhat situational response to external and internal challenges and aimed at adjusting to the existing circumstances rather than changing them. The public decision-making system was based on the officials' desire to secure themselves and preserve their positions. At the same time, the citizens of Belarus continued to be viewed not as the holders of public interest, which should be the basis of public administration, but as a potential threat to the functioning of the hierarchical state apparatus. Those citizens who were forced to leave the country due to politically motivated persecution were seen as a particular threat. As a result, in 2023, we observe an increasing influence of security agencies on public decision-making and, as a consequence, on the lives of Belarusian citizens, who are increasingly being controlled by the authorities.



In January 2023, the law ["On seizure of property"](#) came into force. This law covers both Belarusian and foreign, physical persons and legal entities that committed "unfriendly actions" against "the Republic of Belarus, its legal entities and (or) physical persons". Considering the international political context, it can be assumed that this law became a response of the authorities to the international sanctions imposed on Belarus. This legal act legalizes the seizure of assets of individuals and legal entities, which, in the opinion of the Belarusian government, are related to the decision-making on introducing sanctions against Belarus. Due to the blurriness of the key provisions of this law, decisions on applying its norms will most likely be made in the format of "manual management" employing orders from above. Probably, the Belarusian authorities sought to create a kind of manifest (or warning) addressed, first of all, to Western countries, with the prospect of its arbitrary application to their citizens as well. The concept of "affiliation" with "unfriendly subjects" is also not clearly defined, and potentially any travel to an "unfriendly country" can be broadly interpreted as an "unfriendly action".



On 14 February 2023, [Decree No. 40 "On Cyber Security"](#) was signed. Its purpose was to increase the level of protection of the national information infrastructure from external and internal threats. This Decree defines the specifics of the functioning of the cyber security system at the national level. The Operations and Analytysys Centre under the President of the Republic of Belarus (OAC) will coordinate the activities envisaged in the document, which is likely to strengthen the position of the Center further in the hierarchy of law enforcement agencies. Moreover, the Decree expands the mandate of the OAC, giving it the right to demand unimpeded access to documents, premises, and other objects related to the information infrastructure from government agencies and other organizations. The information infrastructure is defined as a set of technical means, systems, and technologies for working with information. In short, authorized employees of law enforcement agencies, guided by the decree "On cyber security," have the right to access any organization's information at any time. This Decree is a response to cyberattacks on the information resources of government agencies and the leakage of sensitive information that took place in 2020-2022.

In February 2023, [Decree No. 25, "On Consideration of Appeals of Citizens of the Republic of Belarus Abroad on the Issues of Committing Offences."](#) was signed. This document embodied the idea expressed at different levels to return those Belarusians who participated in the protests of 2020 back to the country. In accordance with the Decree, a special commission was created. Belarusians who left the country for fear of being punished for participating in protest activities and wished to return home from abroad could apply to this commission until the end of 2023. In their application to the commission, citizens had to inform authorities about the reasons for their departure from Belarus and the circumstances under which they could be prosecuted. The appeal should also contain such provisions as repentance for their actions, readiness to apologize publicly, to compensate for the damage they caused, and to

respect for the legislation of the Republic of Belarus.

The official statistics on the number of those who appealed to this commission for the past year have yet to be released. There is only a statement by representatives of the [Prosecutor General's Office](#) that by September 2023, there were more than a hundred such appeals. At the same time, it is unclear what quantitative indicators were expected when adopting this Decree. It can be safely assumed that the creation and functioning of this commission has more of a propagandistic rather than any other substantive purpose.



The Concept of Legal Policy of the Republic of Belarus was approved by [Decree No. 196](#) of 28 June 2023. At its core, it is a legal framework that sets the directions for the development of Belarusian legislation in accordance with the new edition of the Constitution. The key idea of the Concept is to prevent possible challenges and threats. It is especially emphasized that the legal work will be based on strengthening the vertical of power according to the formula "a strong president, an influential parliament, an initiative government with a bridging role of the All-Belarusian People's Assembly." Such formulations can be interpreted as officials' aspiration to work to prevent and avoid any manifestation of a public discontent. With a high degree of probability, it is possible to assume the appearance in the future in the legislation of even more measures restricting Belarusians' civil and political rights and freedoms. Interestingly, in parallel, in the social sphere, the state's responsibility is supposed to decrease, and citizens must care more about themselves.

In July 2023, a new version of the law ["On Citizenship"](#) came into force. Among the changes is the requirement for Belarusian citizens living abroad to inform state agencies about holding or obtaining foreign citizenship, residence permits, or other documents of legalization. At the time of preparation of this material, the responsibility for failure to fulfill this norm still had not been established. However, representatives of the interior authorities have already [expressed](#) their readiness to react in case such responsibility is introduced. Besides, the new version of the law added the grounds for revocation of Belarusian citizenship. Citizenship can be revoked because of "a person's enrolment in military service, service in the police, security, justice or other state agencies of a foreign state". Among the grounds for revocation of citizenship, there is still "extremist activity," interpreted by the Belarusian authorities broadly and arbitrarily. It is obvious that decisions on revocation of citizenship will be made in absentia without the presence of the charged in such cases. Such changes in the law aim to punish the opposition abroad and reduce the civil and political activism of the diaspora.

Decree No. 278, ["On the Procedure for Issuing Documents and Performing Actions"](#), resonated greatly in Belarus and abroad. This document amended the rules of administrative procedures and notarial actions, which diplomatic agents and consular officials of the Republic of Belarus are entitled to perform. The latter is no longer authorized to deal with the issue, exchange, and renewal of all types of passports and ID

cards. These actions can now be performed only while physically present of the person in Belarus. Also, the list of documents, the execution of which requires personal presence in the country or by power of attorney, executed only in Belarus, has been significantly expanded. It should be noted that these new provisions do not so much simplify the work of diplomatic missions as they are intended to create a series of problems for Belarusians permanently residing abroad. At the same time, additional financial expenses for traveling to Belarus to solve bureaucratic issues are not the biggest problem. The most painful effect of this decree is for those who cannot return home because of the threat of politically motivated persecution. As a result, such people risk staying abroad without the necessary documents, which violates their fundamental rights. Apart from creating difficulties for Belarusian citizens, these changes pose additional challenges for the countries where the exiled Belarusians live.



In October, the Regulations on the Diplomatic Service were amended. The relevant [Decree No. 334](#) was signed on 26 October 2023. It introduces even more controls and restrictions for professional diplomatic service. In particular, from now on, a citizen cannot be in the diplomatic service if their spouse (as well as parents and children living together with the diplomat) has not only the citizenship of a foreign state but also a residence permit or other document confirming the right to permanent residence in the territory of a foreign state (e.g., the Pole Card). Suppose other close family members of a potential candidate have such documents. In that case, the decision on their entry or employment in the diplomatic service must be approved by the State Security Committee (KGB). Besides, the KGB establishes the procedure of obligatory polygraph examination when a citizen enters the diplomatic service and after the diplomat returns home after serving in Belarusian diplomatic missions in other countries. Officially, such innovations are justified by changes in the international situation. Such decisions are made by the authorities, more likely to prevent the leak of information sensitive to them and protect themselves and their financial assets abroad. However, such measures will hardly help to address the declared tasks. After all, the presence or absence of the documents mentioned above of foreign states does not determine loyalty (or its lack) to the Belarusian regime.

In conclusion, there were no significant or sensational appointments in the vertical of power in 2023. Most appointments were mainly technical and were a planned rotation of mid-level officials. Such a personnel policy is forced one for the country into a severe socio-political and economic crisis. After all, when creative and bold managerial solutions are needed to address the accumulated systemic problems, the country's leadership chooses to preserve the existing order for fear of the consequences of reforms and liberalization, which the regime believes led to the 2020 protests. In addition, the purge of the disloyal, which also affected the public administration system in Belarus, resulted in a situation where there were practically no progressives capable of defending their position among the officials.



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