

International Conference

Democratic Elections for Resolution of Crisis in Belarus

1-2 June 2021



**Sviatlana
Tsikhanouskaya**

**DEMOCRACY
REPORTING
INTERNATIONAL**



**International Foundation
for Electoral Systems**



International Conference

Democratic Elections for Resolution of Crisis in Belarus

The purpose of the conference is to bring together Belarusian and international experts on elections to discuss ideas for holding early elections as a means to ending the political crisis in Belarus. In spring 2021, almost 800,000 Belarusian citizens took part in an online survey to express their support for negotiations leading to early elections and a number of international actors have supported the idea of resolving the crisis through an election. As evidenced by recent surveys conducted through Chatham House (UK) and ZOiS (Germany), trust in the official political institutions in Belarus remains weak. As the current institutions are unable to function effectively, finding the way out of the crisis is becoming even more important.

The conference will bring together political stakeholders from Belarus and abroad, Belarusian and international election experts, representatives of international organizations, and election management bodies from a wide range of countries. Panels comprising Belarusian and international experts will provide an opportunity for an open discussion of political and electoral options, policy approaches, and will specifically focus on exchange of expertise on electoral matters. Invitations were extended to representatives of the current authorities of Belarus in the spirit of pursuing a broad and inclusive public discussion of the resolution of the crisis.

The participants will look at the possible avenues to have dialogue between society and the current authorities of Belarus pave the way towards holding early elections, the modalities for such elections, as well as the longer-term objective of fundamental electoral reform in Belarus, including through adoption of a new election code. Expert panels will consider the experience of other countries in holding post-crisis elections and facilitating longer-term electoral reform. Each panel discussion will be guided by a set of suggested questions and supplemented by contributions from the floor. The conference is expected to lead to more thematic debates on electoral, political and other topics of relevance to Belarus.

The conference is co-organized by IFES, International IDEA and DRI, under the patronage of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the leader of democratic Belarus. Working languages of the conference will be Belarusian, Russian and English.



Annotated Agenda

(Time zone - Minsk, UTC/GMT+3hrs)

1 June 2021:

Towards the Negotiations & New Elections

15:00 – 15:15

Opening Remarks

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Leader of Democratic Belarus

15:15 – 16:30

High Level Panel: Possible democratic solutions for a crisis in Belarus

Moderator:

Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz, Director for Europe and Eurasia, IFES

Speakers:

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Leader of Democratic Belarus

Name Surname

Representative of the current authorities of Belarus

Klára Dobrev

Vice-President, European Parliament

Bill Keating

Congressman, US Congress

Roberto Montella

Secretary-General,
OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Kevin Casas-Zamora

Secretary-General, International IDEA

The panel discussion will focus on the **current state of affairs in Belarus**, the **origins of the crisis and its political and human rights dimensions**. Speakers will also discuss why the current political crisis in Belarus matters from the international perspective, and **how it can be resolved through democratic means**. Participants will specifically focus on the possibilities of a negotiated solution and which international actors could mediate in the process and serve as guarantors for the outputs. Lastly, panelists will consider whether new democratic elections should be the key output of the negotiated solution and what aspects of the electoral process will need to be agreed upon as a way out of the crisis. The discussion will focus on the following **key questions**:

- What are the latest developments and trends in the current crisis in Belarus? Is there space for optimism in the short run and in the long run?
- Why is the current situation in Belarus of importance to foreign governments and international civil society?
- What democratic means can be used to resolve the crisis? Are the negotiations the only way and, if not, what could be other options?
- Why has the goal of new elections as the output of the negotiations been supported internationally? What aspects of holding new elections should be agreed upon during the negotiations?

16:30 – 18:00

Political Panel: Towards new elections – reality check

Moderator:

Michael Meyer-Resende, Executive Director, DRI

Speakers:

Franak Viacorka

Senior Advisor to Sviatlana
Tsikhanouskaya

Volha Kavalkova

Member of Presidium,
Coordination Council

Pavel Latushka

Leader, National Anti-Crisis Management;
Member of Presidium, Coordination Council

Name Surname

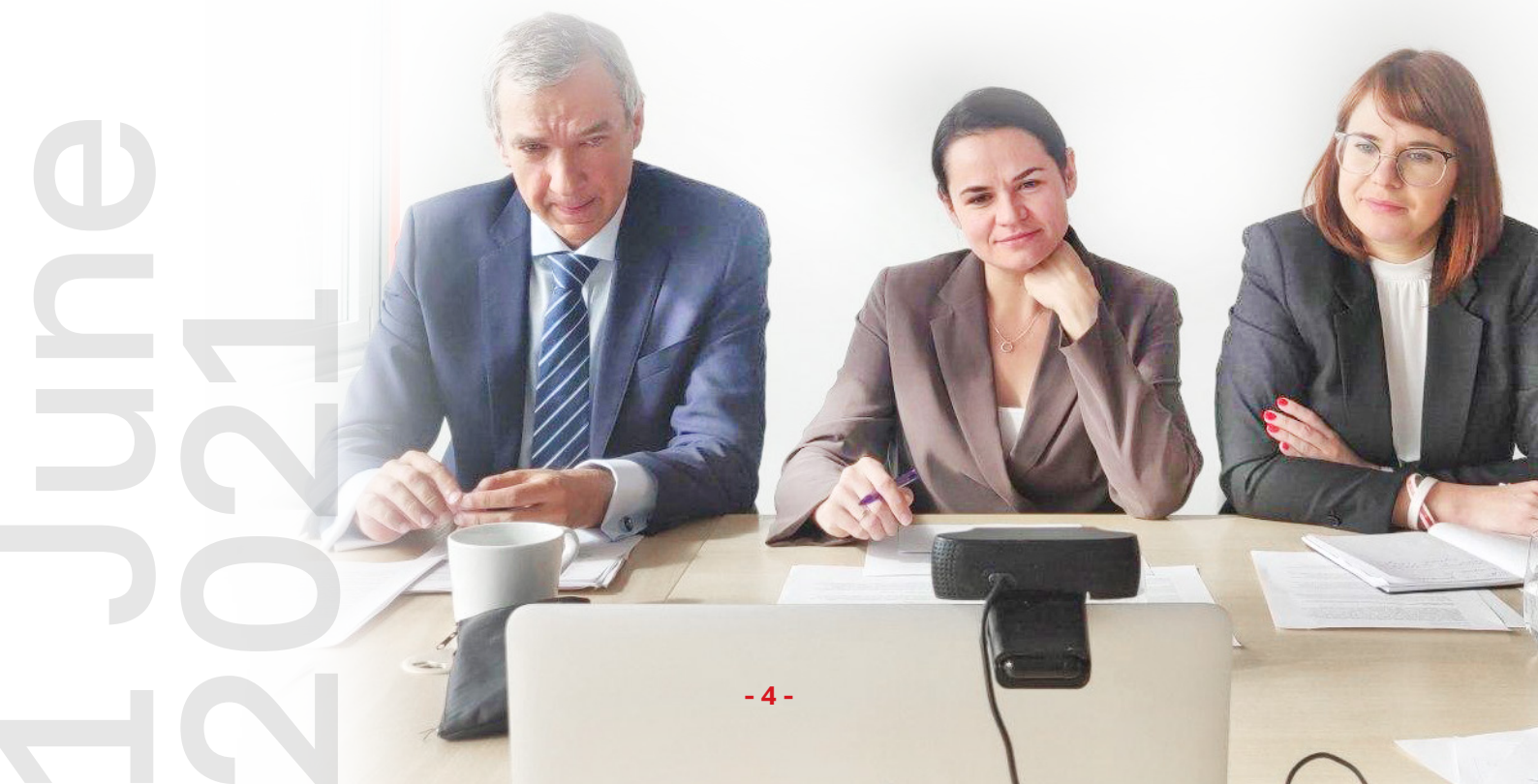
**Representative of the current
authorities of Belarus**

Ambassador Urszula Gacek

International Political and
Elections Expert

This panel will bring together representatives of **key political actors among the proponents of democratic changes in Belarus**. They will be joined by an international expert and diplomat as a discussant. Panelists from Belarus will provide a reality check on **whether the objective of new elections can be achieved** and **what needs to be done to attain it**. The panel does not include representatives from the existing and prospective political parties who will be encouraged to speak from the floor. Contribution from the international expert is envisaged to provide a reflection on the views of the Belarusian actors. The discussion will focus on the following guiding **questions**:

- Is holding new elections an achievable goal? What should be the pre-conditions for having new elections and the negotiations?
- What could be the negotiated sequencing of events in the political transformation?
- What should be the realistic goal for the standard of new elections? What would count as a “good enough” election?



2 June 2021: Elections – How?

15:00 – 16:30 Expert Panel: Short-term election reform

Moderator:

Nana Kalandadze, Programme Manager, International IDEA

Speakers:

Alexander Shlyk

Special Representative on Elections,
Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Aliaksandr Silkou

Coordinator, Campaign
“Right to Choose”

Name Surname

Representative of the current
authorities of Belarus

Representative of Ukraine

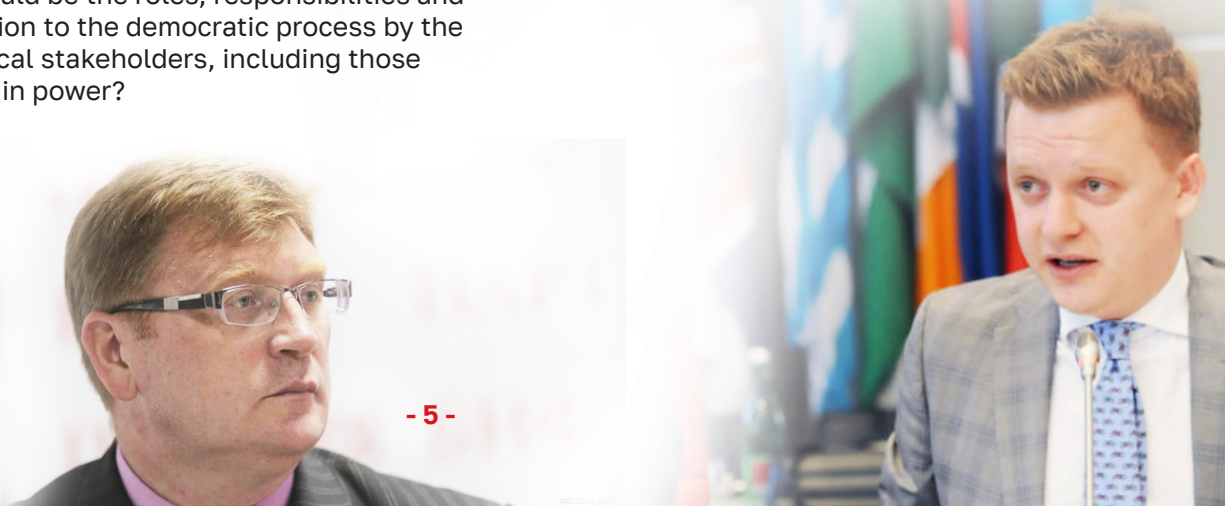
CEC Ukraine – TBC

Iurie Ciocan

Former Chairman of Central Election
Commission of Moldova (2011-2016)

Conducting snap elections as the outcome of the negotiations would allow too short a timeframe for introducing substantial amendments to the existing laws. Therefore, the bodies responsible for holding the elections will need to decide on **how to administer the process within the changing political environment** and on the basis of updated sub-legal regulations. The Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya has recently published a set of draft regulations to be adopted by the reformed Central Election Commission to address formation of election commissions, collection and verification of supporting signatures, access and rights of election observers, and vote counting. Some other aspects of the process might need to be regulated, including within very short timeframes. Several EMBs in the region have the experience of holding **snap elections as part of the political transformation process**. Their inputs and analysis will be important to take into account in Belarus. The participants of the expert panel will consider and exchange views on the following **questions**:

- What should be the general principles for the conduct of new democratic elections to resolve the political crisis?
- What aspects of the process should require specific attention and additional regulation within the confines of the imperfect legal framework? Does the EMB in Belarus have sufficient powers to regulate all aspects of the process and, if not, who should it rely on additionally?
- What should be the roles, responsibilities and contribution to the democratic process by the key political stakeholders, including those currently in power?



16:30 – 18:00

Expert Panel: **Short-term election reform**

Moderator:

Alexander Shlyk, Special Representative on Elections, Office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

Speakers:

Enira Bronitskaya

Human Rights Defender, Election Expert

Lev Margolin

Coordinator, Working Group
on New Constitution

Name Surname

**Representative of the current
authorities of Belarus**

Tamar Zhvania

Chairwoman, Central Election
Commission of Georgia

Zsolt Szolnoki

Secretary-General, Association
of Central and Eastern European
Election Officials (ACEEEO)

The longer-term prospect of democratization in Belarus would require a substantial **reform of the electoral and related legislation**. Revised constitutional provisions would need to be reflected and supplemented by the adoption of new laws to govern the electoral process, support the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms essential for elections, regulate activities of political parties, media outlets and other electoral stakeholders. These reforms would need to be closely coordinated. In this panel discussion, the experts will consider specific legal reforms that would be necessary **to support the sustainability of democratic elections in Belarus**. International community has provided valuable recommendations in the past, and some of the countries in the region have substantial experience of electoral reforms. Participants will focus on the following **questions**:

- To what extent does election reform depend on constitutional reform and what should and could be the sequence of necessary steps?
- What principles should underpin the substance and the process of legal reforms to set the grounds for a broadly accepted election reform? Who are the key stakeholders and how can they be involved already now?
- What previous recommendations of international and citizen observers should take priority and how should they be strategically roadmapped?
- How should the electoral reform be organized and what should be the role of the election management body?
- What could be the crucial key elements in future election legislation?

