

4th BELARUS REALITY CHECK

11th September, 2014, Riga
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia
K. Valdemara Street 3

PROGRAMME

09.00 – 09.30 **REGISTRATION & MORNING COFFEE**

09.30 – 09.45 **OPENING**

Andrejs Pildegovičs, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia

09.45 – 11.15 **US-BELARUS RELATIONS: ARE THE SCALES TIPPING?**

Belarus's Alexander Lukashenka has been doing its best to balance on Ukraine between Russia and the West. With the first ever meeting of the Customs Union, Ukraine and the European Union the position of Minsk (as a neutral place) has been strengthened toward the West. Within this context the initial signs of normalizing relationship between the US and Belarus seems more significant as Belarus may see restoration of these relations more important than the dialogue with the EU. The rapidly changing security situation in East Europe has shifted geopolitics around Minsk, although the US policy has not change on Belarus. This panel will track the record of contacts between the US and Belarus, summarizing the shifting interest of both countries and analyses the prospects of relations development.

11.15 – 11.45 **COFFEE BREAK**

11.45 – 13.15 **SECURITY UPDATE: BELARUS-RUSSIA RELATIONS AFTER CRIMEA**

Observing Minsk balancing act over Crimea a serious question in the West was where is "the red button" when it comes to Belarus armed force. Belarus supposed to have one of the most battle ready and sizable army in the region and Lukashenka woven to defend Belarusians land even against the Russian army. But is the Belarus-Russia military interdependence now a threat to Minsk? How will Moscow react to a new wave of Minsk's reengagement with the West? Is the news about a Russian military (air) base in Belarus reasonable and what would mean? Who is in charge to the current Russian military "objects" in the territory in Belarus? What are the prospects of Minsk and NATO relations?

13.15 – 14.15 **LUNCH**



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14.15 – 15.45 **PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: MANAGING EXPECTATIONS**

Amidst growing economic concerns - connected to the slow-down of Russian economy, the threat of Ukraine's economy collapse as well as the long delayed structural reforms by Minsk - Belarus is preparing for presidential elections what is largely expected to be held early on, in the beginning of 2015. While Minsk is full of rumours about Lukashenka's luck as the Ukraine crisis is giving him a stronger position both at home and at the international scene, what Belarusians think about elections, politics, economic as well as regional and international relations? How Minsk as well as the opposition is getting ready for the elections?

15.45 – 16.15 **COFFEE BREAK**

16.15 – 17.45 **EU-BELARUS: WHAT NOW? FINE TUNING POLICY AND ASSISTANCE**

Will Belarus balanced position on Ukraine helping EU-Belarus relations? Can and will Belarus help banned European agricultural production to Russia? How the presidential elections as well as the still unsolved question of political prisoners influence the upcoming silent dialogue? Engagement versus containment policy with the upcoming Presidential elections: if there is no one strategy can it be a coordinated two track? Within this framework, how EU can help strengthening civil society in Belarus?

18.00 **DINNER** For all participants.



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