

Assistance to migrants at the Belarusian-Polish border

Due to circumstances beyond its control, Belarus has recently faced an increase in the flow of migrants from countries affected by conflicts through our territory to the countries of the European Union. This transit is not something new or unique and is significantly inferior in scale to flows to Greece and Italy. It has occurred earlier, but joint efforts Belarus and neighboring countries successfully ensured the observance of common interests in the field of regional security and border protection.

The situation changed after the EU rejected constructive engagement with Belarus. The EU sanctioned curtailment of international technical assistance projects to ensure border security on the border with Belarus jeopardized the existing Belarusian-European agreements on resolving border issues. The EU has stopped funding an international technical assistance project for the construction of detention centers for illegal migrants in our country, which was provided for by the Readmission Agreement and the Declaration on Partnership for Mobility. Belarus was deprived of the necessary resources and opportunities to continue in the same volume of work on solving common problems of illegal migration.

Since April this year, Belarus has repeatedly appealed to the European Commission with a proposal to hold consultations on this technical assistance project and, in general, on cooperation in the fight against illegal migration. Unfortunately, the EU consistently refuses such a dialogue and politicizes this problem, applying double standards in assessing the actions of its own member states, which are criticized by international organizations (UNHCR, IOM, OSCE, Council of Europe, etc.).

Belarus in no way promotes illegal migration to the EU countries and does not use its airspace for these purposes, as Western countries are constantly trying to present. The visa-free procedure for entry and exit from countries with high migration risks is applied only if there is a valid multiple-entry Schengen visa in the passport with a note of entry into the territory of an EU member state or a member state of the Schengen area, as well as air tickets with confirmation of the date of departure.

Belarus is deeply concerned about the current tense situation on its borders with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, which is exacerbated by the constant demonstration by Western politicians of readiness to accept migrants for humanitarian and economic reasons, thereby spurring and reassuring potential asylum seekers. However, these promises in reality remain an empty PR campaign.

Belarus does not hide anything, because it does not violate its international obligations. In confirmation of this, Belarus has provided international structures with access to migrants at the border from its territory

and continues to cooperate to provide assistance to people in difficult situations together with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration and the Belarusian Red Cross Society.

The assertions of Poland, Lithuania and a number of other states about Belarus' non-admission of humanitarian aid to migrants are an outright lie, which serves to additionally extract money from the EU budget for the construction of their own barbed wire barriers at the border. **The UN High Commissioner for Refugees F. Grandi confirmed that Belarus provided access** to humanitarian aid to migrants through the UNHCR, IOM and the Belarusian Red Cross Society. This was also confirmed by the press secretary of the UN Secretary General during a recent regular briefing at the UN headquarters.

Another confirmation of the cooperation of Belarus, in contrast to Poland and Lithuania, with international organizations is the joint press release of the IOM and the UNHCR dated November 12, 2021, which states that on November 11, the IOM and the UNHCR in Belarus were granted access to a temporary camp on the Belarusian side. border near the international checkpoint "Bruzgi", where a group of approximately 2,000 asylum seekers, refugees and migrants has been stationed since 8 November. There are many children and women among them, including pregnant women. During the visit, UNHCR and IOM delivered some emergency assistance, including hygiene items for children and women, and some food. In the near future they will provide additional assistance - blankets, warm clothes, gloves, hats and boots for children, which will be delivered by the partner of the organizations, the Belarusian Red Cross. During the visit, IOM and UNHCR spoke to the people and provided reliable information about their options.

It draws attention to the fact that **Poland is sending absurd and deliberately inadequate demands of Belarus on the admission of Polish humanitarian convoys to Belarusian territory**. There is no logic in Poland's actions, because such assistance can be easily provided by Poland from its border territory. However, Poland is deliberately and cynically manipulating the facts, substituting its humanitarian convoy for international humanitarian aid.

Moreover, Poland and Lithuania have declared a state of emergency on their border territories. Poland continues to pull military contingent and special equipment to the border, actively pumping up a stop. Water cannons stand close to the barbed wire - a couple of meters from the migrants. Those who manage to break into Polish territory are taken away by the Poles along the border and forcefully thrown back to Belarus.

Poland is committing lawlessness not only against foreign asylum seekers, but also against its citizens who are trying to show mercy to

disadvantaged people. For example, the Polish public association "Doctors at the Border" reported that volunteer doctors are attacked by the Polish military, they damage cars, punching wheels and breaking headlights.

Journalists, in principle, do not have access to border areas, and those who enter there are at risk of being detained by force. At the same time, Belarus provides access to journalists and media representatives, including foreign ones, in particular CNN.

For its part, **Belarus did not observe the terrible situation provoked by the Polish authorities at the border, and decided to support migrants with everything necessary to save their lives** while waiting for Europe to respond to their call for international protection and asylum.

Grocery kits were handed over to the spontaneous camp of migrants near the Polish border, which included bakery and sausage products, stew, water, sweets and fruits, as well as hygiene kits, warm clothes and blankets, firewood, and electric generators. Already transferred: drinking water - 7 tons; milk - 6 tons; meat products - 1.5 tons; sausages - 2 tons, beef stew - 500 kg; canned meat - 3 tons; canned vegetables - 0.8 tons; bakery products - 7 tons; confectionery - 3 tons; fruit - 1 ton; 100 food sets, warm clothes - 3200 units, clothes - 1000 units; 811 wool blankets. Help continues to flow.

The aid was collected by state-owned enterprises of the food and light industry of Belarus with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UNHCR, the Afghan community in the Republic of Belarus, as well as Belarusian non-governmental public associations, in particular the Belarusian Women's Union.

Belarusian doctors provide qualified free medical assistance to people stranded at the border both directly on the spot and in medical institutions if necessary, in particular to pregnant women and children. Measures are being taken to prevent the spread of coronavirus infection in places where migrants gather.

The current chaos on the border is not Belarus's fault, but the West is persistently trying to convince the world and the European community of the opposite. **As noted by The Guardian, Belarus has become a convenient excuse to “mask the cruelty of Europe”. The facts show that it is not Belarus that “instrumentalizes” migrants**, as the EU and some other states say from the high tribunes. The EU is “instrumentalizing” when, through accusations of Belarus, it tries to justify its refusal to comply with the obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and numerous violations of European and international norms, both in the field of human rights and asylum.

Belarus expects the EU to start acting in accordance with the statements of the head of European diplomacy J. Borrell, who said in an interview with

France 24 that “The problem of migrants cannot be solved by building a wall on the border between Poland and Belarus”.

Belarus is ready to work with all interested parties, including Western countries, putting aside political differences in order to prevent further aggravation of the migration crisis in our region, which could develop into a humanitarian catastrophe, and save human lives.