

Belarus' Digital Brain Drain

Summary

The article discusses the main stages in the recent history of the Belarusian IT community. The emergence of a country's IT sector in the 2000s. Its rapid growth as a result of targeted market reforms that didn't affect other sectors of the archaic command-and-control economy, resulting in the Belarusian IT sector being dubbed "Seoul at the heart of Pyongyang". The attempted anti-authoritarian revolution of 2020, with the IT community among its main driving forces. An overview of its pioneering solutions and initiatives, some of which have gained global exposure. The defeat of the revolution and the beginning of a mass exodus of IT professionals from Belarus, which accelerated significantly after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, creating the phenomenon of the Belarusian IT sector in exile. Lastly, an overview of the two waves of IT emigration (before and after the war), detailing exactly who left and where they went, what impact their departure had on the Belarusian economy, and the situation and prospects of those who left and those who stayed.

The Early Days

To understand how the Belarusian IT sector became one of the most successful in the post-Soviet world, one has to go back to the 1950s, when the electronic revolution reached the USSR. In capitalist countries, the creation and location of new industries were decided by the market, but in the Soviet Union, with its command-and-control system, these decisions were made by the Communist Party. Soviet planners decided to choose Belarus as one of the main development sites for the new electronic industry. In the 1950s and 1960s, a whole range of factories and research centres were [established](#) in Belarus, developing and producing TV sets, radios, computing equipment, optics and microcircuits for the military and space industries.

In order to provide the new sector with human resources, a nationwide training system for mathematicians, engineers and programmers was established. In 1964 the Minsk Radio-Technical Institute was opened, which still remains one of the main talent foundries for the Belarusian IT sector. When it first opened its doors it [had](#) 2,500 students, and by the 1970s this number had more than doubled to 5,200. Today the institute, which was renamed the Belarusian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics, has 16,000 students.

As a result of such decisions and large public investment, by the time the Soviet Union collapsed, the Belarusian electronic sector had become one of the most advanced not just in the USSR, but in the whole of Eastern Europe. However, when the Iron Curtain fell, the industry was unable to integrate swiftly into the global market, and became mired in crisis. Public investment ceased, many businesses suddenly found themselves unable to compete with foreign companies and closed down, and IT specialists began to leave the country. At the same time, open borders also brought new opportunities. In 1993, two Belarusian programmers founded the US-Belarusian venture EPAM Systems, which over the next 20 years would become the largest developer of custom software in Central and Eastern Europe, and the first IT company from the region to be listed on the NYSE. But whilst the Belarusian IT boom would start much later, in the 1990s the future giants of the industry were already taking their first steps.

Hi-Tech Park

One of the two major events that took the Belarusian IT industry to a new level was the [creation](#) of the Hi-Tech Park (HTP) in 2005. By then, the internet had already spread across

the country, fledgling IT companies were signing their first large contracts with Western clients, and the state had spotted a promising sector and decided to give it a boost.

The decree on the establishment of an IT park was intended to create something akin to America's Silicon Valley to attract investment in digital technologies and increase their export. Unlike most Western and Asian technology parks which usually look like a cluster of buildings in a particular area, Belarus' HTP is a virtual park and its legal regime applies throughout the entire country. The park's residents received [benefits](#) unprecedented in the former Soviet Union. These included exemption from profit tax and VAT on sales of services within Belarus, a significantly reduced income tax, reduced contribution to the Social Insurance Fund and many more besides.

Valery Tsepkalo, a former Belarusian ambassador to the United States, was one of the initiators of the park, and its first director. He decided to emphasise the development of an outsourcing model - Belarusian companies were to develop software for foreign customers. The model proved to be successful; during the first five years of the HTP's operation, its exports increased [tenfold](#), from \$22 million in 2006 to \$215 million in 2010, making Belarus a prominent player in the global market of software development.

Belarusian companies also developed their own products, but this was more of an exception to the rule. The most famous of these was the online multiplayer game 'World of Tanks', released in 2010 by the developer Wargaming. At its peak, the company was valued at \$3 billion, making Wargaming's founder Viktor Kyslyy one of the richest people in Belarus. In 2012, for the first time, a company with Belarusian roots - EPAM Systems - launched its IPO on the New York Stock Exchange. The same year, businessman Viktor Prokopenia completed one of the biggest deals in the history of Belarusian IT, selling his company Viaden Media to an Israeli investor. The company was [valued](#) at around €95 million, although the exact sum of the deal remains undisclosed.

But by the mid-2010s, growth began to slow down. Between 2011 and 2016, HTP exports increased less than fourfold, to \$820 million. According to many market players, it was the once-successful outsourcing model that was dragging the sector down this time.

Decree Number Eight

In 2017, the Belarusian IT community started widely discussing the industry's prospects, existing constraints and ways to reform. The main complaint was that the Belarusian legislation encouraged an outsourcing model by imposing artificial restrictions on the development of in-house products. For example, it was impossible to legally withdraw revenue from the AppStore and Google Play markets, and there was no legislation on venture capital financing for start-ups, which made launching extremely difficult.

[According](#) to an industry insider, "We made Viber [a messenger app] through outsourcing - the client spent tens of millions of dollars on development. The product took off, they sold it and made \$900 million from just one product, which is comparable to the annual revenues of our entire industry. It is a [product] model that gives the industry a chance to make a breakthrough with limited human resources."

The Belarusian authorities listened to the criticism. Valery Tsepkalo was sacked as HTP director while the business community began discussing the provisions of a new Decree on the Hi-Tech Park. The discussion continued throughout 2017. Finally, in December, 'Presidential Decree No. 8 on the Development of the Digital Economy' was [published](#), marking the biggest change in the Belarusian IT industry since the creation of Hi-Tech Park.

The decree introduced certain institutions of English law for HTP residents (convertible loans, option agreements, non-competition and anti-poaching agreements, compensations for property losses), and created a legal framework for the development of IT product companies and operations with cryptocurrencies. Belarus became the first country in the world to legalise blockchain smart contracts. The list of business areas of the Hi-Tech Park's resident companies was expanded considerably to include artificial intelligence, biotechnologies, the development of unmanned vehicles and cybersports.

Decree Number Eight was immediately dubbed revolutionary. In the first six months after it was adopted, HTP exports grew by 40%. And this figure does not even take into account the new companies joining the Park, of which there were 200 in 2018 alone – more than the total number of companies in the Park's twelve-year history. In November 2018, there were 388 residents in the HTP; by January 2020 there were 758 companies with over 58,000 employees. In July 2020, the last peaceful month before the political storm, the total number of residents [increased](#) to 63,000 tech employees, spread across 886 companies.

Exports of IT services became 2.4 times higher between 2017 and 2019. The sector had become the main engine driving the growth of the Belarusian economy. In 2019, tech [accounted](#) for half of all GDP growth – as much as industry, construction, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and trade combined. Total exports of HTP residents' services for 2019 exceeded \$2 billion. The share of IT services in GDP rose to 6.5%. In terms of its impact on the economy, the IT industry was on a par with agriculture, transport and the production of building materials. There were plans to increase its share even further, to 10% of GDP by 2023.

In early 2020, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, visited the HTP. "Inspired by what I saw at Hi-Tech Park", - he [wrote](#) on his Twitter following the visit. "A great example of how Belarus can seize its extraordinary growth potential by embracing forward-looking economic policies and smart regulation. It's clear how impactful American investment can foster prosperity across the globe". In 2020, the sector indeed continued to grow at an unprecedented rate. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, HTP's exports [reached](#) a record \$2.7 billion. The growing prominence of Belarus' IT sector raised hopes that it could gradually lead to the opening up of the country's state-dominated economy and, perhaps, to some political reforms. The August 2020 presidential election changed everything.

2020 Presidential Election

In 2020, the Belarusian authorities made a series of critical mistakes, resulting in the worst political crisis in the country's history. Firstly, they completely mishandled the coronavirus outbreak, calling it a conspiracy and refusing to take any action to prevent the spread of the virus. Thus, not only did they force the public to switch to independent media in search of information, but to engage in grassroots self-organisation. And secondly, during the election campaign, after arresting major opposition candidates and barring them from running, the authorities allowed the candidacy of who they assumed was the weakest of all – Sviatlana Tsikhanouskya, who was then the unknown wife of a political prisoner and popular YouTube vlogger Siarhei Tsikhanouski. Add general fatigue from Lukashenko's 26-year rule and the economic stagnation of the previous decade. All this together created the perfect storm.

One of the distinguishing features of the 2020 election campaign, which became the brightest in the history of independent Belarus, was the active participation of IT people – the main driving force of the Belarusian middle class, who had long outgrown the country's archaic authoritarian system. They were the authors of various initiatives which played a

crucial role in the election campaign, ranging from simple crowdfunding platforms to more sophisticated digital solutions for documenting election rigging. The most prominent of these was the online [platform](#) *Golos* (Voice), developed by a team of IT specialists to monitor the integrity of the vote count. Before casting their ballots, voters were asked to take a photo and upload it to a special mobile app, indicating their constituency. The software then processed all the ballots, finding inconsistencies with the official data. A total of 1.6 million Belarusians registered on the platform (more than 20 per cent of eligible voters), with over a million of them uploading their votes. The analysis [identified](#) numerous falsifications at all levels, including that the number of votes for Tsikhanouskaya in the official results was underestimated by a factor of 13.

Following the announcement of the election results, according to which incumbent President Lukashenko received more than 80 per cent of the vote, mass protests erupted in Belarus. There were three days of bloody clashes between protesters and the police and army all across the country. More than a dozen people were killed or went missing, and thousands were detained. For three days the Internet was completely shut down. Only on the fourth day, when the 'hot' phase of the protests subsided, did the authorities dare to switch the internet back on, letting Belarusians learn what had been happening in the country. People were shocked and outraged at the level of police brutality towards ordinary citizens, who were merely demanding a fair vote recount. Factories, mines and many large enterprises went on strike. All over the country, people took to the streets demanding free and fair elections and bringing to justice those responsible for police brutality, in what became the largest demonstrations in the history of independent Belarus.

The IT people once again found themselves on the frontline. For example, Mikita Mikado, founder of the Belarusian unicorn start-up PandaDoc, [set up](#) a fund to support and offer free IT education to those police officers who resigned from the force. A criminal case was immediately brought against the company, and the employees of its Belarusian office who had nothing to do with the founder's initiative were detained and de facto 'taken hostage'. Other IT developers created digital solutions to coordinate protests and strikes. Through special chatbots in the Telegram messenger app, it was possible to automatically inform human rights activists about one's detention, and get in touch with people from one's company to organise a strike or other civil disobedience actions.

In a further escalation, developer Andrei Maksimov [created](#) software that deanonymised the Belarusian security officers. According to him, the algorithm was able to recognise the face of a person involved in the crackdown, even if it was hidden behind a mask or balaclava. Although the programme required a database of photographs of security service personnel, which severely limited its capabilities, the demonstration of its operation, according to former police officers, made a great impression on their colleagues.

Reprisals

Despite the unprecedented protest of 2020, when Aleksander Lukashenko's authoritarian regime faltered, he managed to retain power and went on a counter-offensive. All protest leaders and activists were arrested or forced to flee the country. All independent media were banned with many journalists declared extremists and terrorists. Some 45,000 people have gone through prison and over a thousand received long prison sentences. The repression didn't spare the IT community, which became public enemy number one in the eyes of the Lukashenko regime.

Long before the election, in his 2017 address to the nation, the Belarusian ruler warned the IT community to stay out of politics: "I instructed the chairman of the Investigative Committee

to go there [to the Hi-Tech Park], gather them - they are no fools - and warn them: guys, stop fooling around. We will watch you up to a certain point and then put you in line with everyone else. You think you are different, you mighty IT people?"

Nevertheless, a fundamental change in the authorities' attitude towards the IT community occurred during the 2020 election campaign. Suffice to say that one of Lukashenko's main rivals in the election race was the founder of Hi-Tech Park, Valery Tsepkalo. Immediately after the election, Lukashenko [promised](#) revenge on the rebellious IT workers: "Tell me, what do the IT people want? I've already created a paradise for them. But no, it turns out they want more." He resented the privilege of the "petty bourgeois, rich people and IT workers," adding that their lives of contentment had made them want power, igniting protests. Lukashenko [called](#) Arkady Dobkin, founder of EPAM, Belarus' largest IT company, a scoundrel and accused him of working for Western intelligence services. Lastly, he warned the IT people who had already left the country not to return. From being the engine of the economy and the goose that lays the golden eggs, the Belarusian IT community had become a hostile element, awaiting reprisals. The reaction was swift – IT specialists started to leave Belarus.

By the end of 2020, there [were](#) around 100,000 IT professionals working in Belarus, almost 70,000 of whom were employed by the Hi-Tech Park resident companies. According to various estimates, between several thousand and 20,000 IT workers left the country in the first year of the crackdown. There was no reliable counting methodology, but the most popular estimate among sector insiders was up to 10,000 departures, or 5-10% of the total number of the sector employees. In May 2021, Rocketdata CEO Darya Danilova [estimated](#) that about 15% of developers had left because of developments in the country, including "almost all top IT executives."

"There is no person in Belarus today who has not been affected by repression," Vera Reshetina, co-founder of the start-up 'Workee', [told](#) Forbes magazine. Before moving abroad, she participated in the start-up accelerator 'Imaguru', which was forced to close under pressure from the authorities. Her husband's daughter and a developer of her start-up were both detained while her partner was forced to leave the country because of pressure from security forces.

The First Wave

Independent opinion polls are banned in Belarus, and therefore the best indicator of sentiment among IT professionals – and the number of departures – is a regular online survey conducted by Belarus' most popular IT website dev.by. In September 2020, just after the crackdown started, they conducted the first large scale [survey](#) with more than three thousand participants. More than 50% of IT workers were considering relocation, but planned to stay in Belarus in the short term and monitor developments. 35% were planning to leave, 4% had already left the country and another 4% were happy with everything and saw no need to leave. Among those who left, Ukraine was the most popular destination (25%), followed by the USA, Russia, Poland and Germany which received about 10% respectively.

Among those who were only *considering* a move, Poland was by far the most popular choice (64%), followed by Lithuania (45%), Ukraine (37%), Germany, the Netherlands and other Western countries (20-30% each). The three largest deciding factors towards moving, cited by 80% of those surveyed, were the fading of the protest, the prospect of Lukashenko remaining in power, and fear for their safety. On the other hand, the main deterrent for the

'considering' group was family, children and parents to take care of – reasons mentioned by half of the respondents. 43% didn't want to leave as they planned to fight for their rights and democratic change in Belarus.

Seeing the events in the Belarusian IT sector, its neighbouring countries – Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine – decided to take advantage of the situation and lure Belarusian IT specialists towards their own industry. In September 2020, Poland launched the Poland Business Harbour (PBH) scheme to facilitate the relocation of Belarusian professionals from the IT sector. PBH provides IT professionals and their families with accelerated immigration treatment, the opportunity to work freely in Poland and conduct business activities on an equal footing with Polish citizens. PBH quickly became the most popular relocation scheme by far. As of October 2022, more than 53,000 Belarusian IT workers and their family members have received Polish visas under the scheme, although only between a third and a quarter of them have actually moved.

Other countries launched similar schemes. The Lithuanian government made it easy for Belarusian emigrants to open bank accounts, set up companies and declare taxes online. The Latvian authorities set up a special group to expedite the processing of visa applications from Belarusian IT specialists. Ukraine facilitated the process of obtaining residence permits and extended the period of temporary stay for Belarusian IT specialists and their family members to 180 days.

In January 2021 dev.by conducted their [second](#) big survey. The number of departures increased from 4% to 15%, in comparison with September 2020. The structure of relocation destinations also changed considerably. Poland took first place by a wide margin. 43% of those who moved ended up there compared to 10% six months earlier. 15% went to Ukraine (compared to 25% half a year earlier), and almost 10% went to Lithuania (compared to 1.7% in September). The surveys recorded that it was mainly senior specialists who moved. Developer (software engineer) was the most popular profession among them - 46% of the total number.

But despite numerous alarmist forecasts, in 2020-21, the majority of Belarusian IT workers considered relocation, yet never actually left Belarus. This applied to 85% of participants in a dev.by January survey. Moreover, not only had the Belarusian IT sector not shrunk, but it continued to grow. "Despite all the challenges of 2020, the Hi-Tech Park ended the year with positive dynamics", Lyubov Mayorova, spokesperson for the HTP administration, [told](#) the Estonian publication Delfi. "Exports increased by 25% to \$2.7 billion, while foreign direct investment inflow increased by 26% to more than \$330 million. 236 new resident companies joined the HTP in 2020, and another 65 joined by March 2021. Over the past year, the Park has grown by almost 9,000 people. There was no outflow of residents or those who decided to join the HTP."

The main reason why the IT business was in no hurry to leave Belarus was multiple privileges and preferences that remained in place. Despite numerous threats from the authorities, the only negative change for the park employees was the abolition at the beginning of 2021 of the preferential income tax rate, which was supposed to be in effect until 2049. Instead of 9%, HTP workers now pay the standard 13% income tax.

[According](#) to Anna Oginskaya, a researcher at the BEROC Centre for Economic Research, the distinctive feature of the 2020-21 migration wave was the relocation of profit centres, key departments, specialists and company management but the situation was far from a mass exodus of the IT professionals. Prominent Belarusian IT manager and blogger Sergei Lavrinenko [made](#) a similar point. In his 2021 interview, he said that for a real mass exodus of

IT workers, a disaster would have to happen - either the closure of the Hi-Tech Park, or an armed conflict.

War in Ukraine

On 24 February 2022, Russian troops attacked Ukraine. The ground offensive began simultaneously from three directions – from Crimea in the south, from Donbas and Russia in the east, and in the north from the territory of Belarus, where a large group of Russian troops was deployed under the guise of military exercises. The West swiftly sanctioned Belarus as a country complicit in the aggression, while many Western companies announced withdrawals from the Belarusian market and restricted access to their services, including many tech companies.

Due to sanctions, many foreign customers started refusing to work with Belarusian companies that still had a physical presence in Belarus, to protect themselves from secondary US and EU sanctions. The disconnection of some Belarusian banks from the SWIFT interbank transfer system caused problems with financial settlements. Belarusian IT companies started experiencing problems with blocked accounts and access to cloud services. All this caused a new mass exodus of IT specialists from Belarus, which was exacerbated by fears of Belarus going to war with Ukraine and potential mobilisation.

In contrast to the previous migration wave of 2020-21, when the initiative to relocate came mainly from the employees. After the outbreak of war many IT companies started forcing their employees to relocate. Some firms chartered entire flights to get their employees out of Belarus.

According to another dev.by [survey](#) with more than three thousand participants, following the outbreak of war, 80% of Belarusian IT companies have launched full or partial relocation schemes. Optional relocation was offered by 70% of the companies. In 6.5% of cases, companies relocated their entire staff, and refusal to relocate meant termination of employment. In 5% of cases, companies relocated only senior and key specialists. 17% of survey participants said that their companies didn't offer any relocation schemes.

In terms of destinations, half of the employees were allowed to choose any location to work remotely. Poland was once again the most popular country offered by companies, cited by 62% of respondents. It was followed by Georgia (55%), Lithuania (35%) and, somewhat unexpectedly, Uzbekistan (26%) which launched a special migration programme to facilitate the relocation of Belarusian and Russian specialists to its own IT park. But, as some Belarusian IT workers pointed out, Uzbekistan, like Georgia, was seen by many as an intermediate destination, simply because they didn't need a visa to get there.

The second migration wave in 2022 proved to be much larger than the first. [According](#) to Aleksander Khomich, head of the Belarusian IT company Andersen, while 5 to 10% of IT specialists left Belarus after the 2020 crisis, another 20% will do so in 2022. Katerina Bornukova, director of the BEROCC Centre for Economic Research, [provides](#) similar figures: "We are seeing a much greater exodus. And I fear that without political change this will become a much more active and irreversible process. In 2020, we were saying that 5-10% of IT professionals had left. Now we can talk about 20-30%."

After the outbreak of war in Ukraine, entire companies started to relocate, something that was almost unheard of in 2020-21. In April 2022, computer game developer Wargaming, with 2,400 employees in Belarus, announced its departure from the country. The company

transferred its Belarusian and Russian offices to another firm and closed its studio in Minsk. Belarus' largest IT employer, EPAM, spent more than \$33 million in the first three months of the war on relocating its employees from Russia and Belarus. SOFTSWISS gaming software developer relocated half of its 1000 Belarus-based employees. "Our employees are privileged to have a choice, and the war in Ukraine helped many of them realise that relocation is currently the only way to bring their families to safety," SOFTSWISS founder Ivan Montik [says](#). "Our company is offering them complete support from arranging charter flights to providing accommodation and assistance with finding a school or kindergarten for kids."

The exodus was so massive that, for the first time in the history of the Belarusian IT sector, the number of hires was significantly lower than the number of dismissals. In the first nine months of 2022, the net [outflow](#) was more than 13,000 people. The sector's growth also [stalled](#). In June 2022, IT grew by 1% instead of the usual 8%, in July there was a drop of more than 8% and in August a drop of more than 3%. In other words, IT, once one of the few sectors driving growth, has become another industry in crisis.

Exile

How many IT specialists have left Belarus and where have they gone? There is no exact answer to these questions. The latest attempt to find some was a [major survey](#) on dev.by in June 2022, with more than five thousand participants. With high confidence, dev.by concluded that in less than two years, from autumn 2020 to summer 2022, about 20,000 IT workers had left Belarus.

The structure of migration has also changed. According to the questionnaires, it was mainly senior specialists who left after August 2020, whereas after the outbreak of war it was a much larger group of mid-level workers. Also for the first time, Belarusian IT companies have started to relocate junior specialists. Of those who took part in the June 2022 survey, 40% said they had already left Belarus (16% before the war and 23% after). Another 21% want to leave, 17% are undecided and 22% plan to stay.

There is no exact data on which countries Belarusian IT specialists are currently living in, but it is safe to say that the first place is once again occupied by Poland. The most recent number comes from June 2022, when dev.by estimated that between 8,000 and 10,000 Belarusian IT specialists moved there. Today the number is likely much higher, as the number of IT specialists and their family members who received Polish visas under the Poland Business Harbour programme alone has risen from 33,000 in June 2022 to 53,000 in October.

Georgia is another popular destination. Georgia's interior minister said that 15,777 Belarusians had entered the country in the first three weeks after the outbreak of war. Dev.by believes that many of them were IT specialists. By summer 2022, half of them had already left the country. Some moved to Western countries, and some returned to Belarus after the first shock of the war had passed. Nonetheless, there are still 2,000-4,000 Belarusian IT specialists living in Georgia, and the Telegram chat of the local Belarusian IT community has two and a half thousand participants.

Lithuania is home to another significant Belarusian IT community. As of May 2022, there were just over 2,000 people working in the Lithuanian offices of Belarusian IT companies. In autumn 2022, two recently relocated companies with Belarusian roots – EPAM and Wargaming – became the second and third largest IT companies in Lithuania. In 2021, the

Lithuanian Deputy Minister of Economy and Innovation mentioned three thousand Belarusians in the Lithuanian IT market. With the outbreak of war in Ukraine, their number has only increased.

A certain number of Belarusian IT workers remain in Ukraine, where there were around 2,000-4,000 of them prior to the war (their Telegram chat still has more than a thousand members). Furthermore, according to a local IT park official, 2,500 IT workers arrived in Uzbekistan from Belarus in the first two weeks of the war alone. Other less popular destinations include Armenia, Latvia, Germany, the UK, the US, Canada, the Netherlands and Western countries in general. Overall, as of autumn 2022, it is safe to assume that some 25,000 Belarusian IT workers have left the country, about a quarter of their total number.

The mass exodus of IT workers doesn't mean that the sector itself will cease to exist in Belarus. Firstly, there are companies operating in the domestic and Russian markets. Secondly, Belarus still has a system for training new IT specialists who, while not able to fully replace the high-level specialists who have left, can counteract their departure. This is despite the fact the main IT university in Belarus has for the first time [reduced](#) enrolment in IT subjects. And thirdly, [according](#) to a prominent Belarusian IT entrepreneur, Kirill Voloshin, "Gradually, Belarus will turn into something like a grey zone. Having an office there would be, how shall I put it mildly, not very decent, not very good for the reputation. This would indicate, if not fraud, then at least indifference. That said, Belarus will still be popular, as its tax incentives for IT are quite significant."

The progressive and politically active IT sector, which has become the face of Belarus over the last ten years, will persist, [says](#) Belarusian economist Lev Lvovsky, as a kind of community, a kind of network, but abroad: "We can see that companies, even after they relocate, still remain in many ways Belarusian IT companies and retain ties with each other. It gives hope that we will have a kind of Belarusian IT sector in exile."

So far, it looks like this prediction is coming true. Even abroad, IT specialists remain actively involved in Belarus' political life. Various crowdfunding projects, such as helping the families of political prisoners or helping Belarusian volunteers in the Ukrainian army, are largely funded by them. Perhaps, the most ambitious of these projects is '[Digital Belarus](#),' designed by Pavel Liber, the man behind the 2020 'Voice' platform for alternative vote counting. According to him, 'Digital Belarus' is a project of digital democracy which will allow users to vote, pay taxes and in the future possibly even have a digital passport. The platform will have its own payment system, it will be possible to search for and offer jobs, receive education and medical services. "I think in the future we will move from the state as a territory to the state as a value-based community, so why not try that now?" [concludes](#) Liber.