

# Dialogue Between Belarus And The European Union

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## THE ROLE OF BELARUS AS A NEIGHBOUR COUNTRY OF THE EU

The Republic of Belarus has been an independent state on the European continent in its modern dimension for about sixteen years as a result of the collapse of one of the most powerful empires in the history of mankind – the former Soviet Union. Due to its favourable geographical position, being located on the crossroads of transit flows (West – East) of both goods and human resources, including tourists and migrants, between the countries of the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation, Belarus has been gradually creating its own image, arguable from certain points of view of other European countries.

## THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A LEADING LOCOMOTIVE ON THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EU- BELARUS RELATIONSHIP: SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

The European Union appears to be the most powerful and influential political and economic block on the border of Belarus. In many respects, the European Union is a remarkable success and a great achievement of joint efforts of hundreds of millions of European citizens who had once come to a decision to live in a peaceful, democratic area maintaining good, stable relations with their neighbours. The EU has created a frontier-free single market and a single currency, the euro. Its

membership has grown from six to twenty-seven members, bringing the EU's population to nearly half a billion.

Our neighbour-countries: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia are young members of the European Union. Friendship with neighbours, an active economic cooperation and integration with them corresponds to the national interests of our country. Unfortunately, the current politics of the Belarusian authorities in their attitude towards the EU breaks this fundamental principle. Belarus hasn't got a Programme of cooperation with the EU within the framework of the strategic document of the Union "New Neighbourhood". There is no Embassy or any permanent Representation of the EU in our country. We are the only country of Europe that is by the board of the Council of Europe. Since 1997 the EU, OSCE haven't recognized any elections in Belarus to be democratic and free, which appears to be one more evidence of an obvious anti-European politics of Belarus. The authorities of the country have ignored numerous attempts of different European structures to start a dialogue in order to overcome the crisis. The Programme "Step by Step", offered by the democratic forces of the country and supported by the representatives of the EU, has also failed because of the reluctance of the Belarusian authorities to make even small steps towards the European institutions.

## READINESS OF THE EU FOR DIALOGUE IN ITS RELATIONS WITH BELARUS. THE CURRENT POSITION OF BELARUS

The Government of the country still doesn't participate in comprehensive programmes of the EU on modernization and development of infrastructure, on education, cultural exchange. And, in general, the sphere of intercultural communications and exchanges with western

countries is becoming now a sort of taboo for the present Belarusian authorities. Hence – their politics aimed at humanitarian, spiritual isolation of the country, especially, young citizens, from the European civilized world. We are not real partners on humanitarian projects which are aimed at creating the common European values and information space.

Besides, Belarus suffers far more from losses of possibilities missed because of blocking business-projects of domestic enterprises with European corporations. Belarusian cities and towns do not take part in various investment programmes on locating useful enterprises of European corporations. The EU hasn't recognized Belarus to be a country with a market economy yet.

Thus, despite a declared multivectorial Belarusian foreign policy we can state that there exists a crisis in Belarusian-and-European relations. We are not able to protect our national interests at talks with those who create and determine the design of modern political, economic, trade and humanitarian relations in Europe.

The EU, which is changing dynamically, demands that the Republic of Belarus should elaborate its policy adequate to new legislative and institutional frames created for future development between the Republic of Belarus and Europe. In the process of development of relations between Belarus and the EU there exist a number of problems and challenges. Within the EU there have existed different points of view on the development of relations between Belarus and the EU.

Now the situation is changing rapidly, the European Union has begun acting. We know that the European Union has rejected the trade preferences for the goods exported from Belarus because of the violence of the rights of non-governmental, free trade-unions within the country. If Belarus had fulfilled 12 terms on democratization of the Belarusian society the European Union would have presented certain assistance. The Belarusian authorities tried to prevent the rejection of the trade preferences, but, in fact, they have made only `cosmetic operations`: few

political leaders (oppositioners) which had been accused and made working far in the province, were allowed to return home before the end of their term. But, in general, the situation concerning the current trade-unions rights hasn't changed for the better.

The Republic of Belarus is now out of the process of negotiations on joining the EU. Belarus is too far from implementation of those three criteria concerning the EU membership (political, economic, institutional). Moreover, Belarus is the only European country that is not a member of the European Council.

The relations between the EU and Belarus were frozen at the end of 1996, beginning of 1997 as none of the International organizations recognized the results of the Parliamentary elections and Constitutional referendum. Over this period there have been adopted a lot of different statements and resolutions. As far as the Presidential elections 2006, the results of them haven't been recognized by the EU either, as there have been a lot of facts of falsifications. All those European documents state that the situation related to the sphere of human rights in Belarus has become worse. Now we can say about numerous repressions in relation to the opponents of the authoritarian regime in the country, to the non-governmental organizations and mass-media. You know that the EU has imposed humanitarian sanctions against 31 active supporters of the regime.

When Belarus carries on its negotiations with the EU for joining the EU it will have to come into agreement with all members of the EU. Belarus will have to make laws and rules which are registered in the main treaties of the EU.

The success of those negotiations will depend on a degree of willingness of our country to adapt legislative norms and standards of the EU and, of course, on a wish and a good will of the EU itself to see Belarus side by side.

We know that in November 2006 the EU sent the Belarusian official authorities a message concerning the performance of democratic reforms within the country. It contains twelve terms and if they are observed, Europe will start maintaining an active good-neighbour policy. The message was also aimed at informing the population of Belarus about readiness of the EU for an effective dialogue in its relations with Belarus. So, Belarusians (at least, the most advanced of them) know that the EU is ready to improve its relations with Belarus, but it isn't able to make really practical steps without an official support inside the country. The EU is supporting those people in Belarus who are organising peaceful social actions (for example, as the European march, which has taken place recently) for observing human rights and conducting democratic elections in their own country.

At present there carried out official negotiations on the matter of opening a mission of the European Commission in Minsk. According to the words of the coordinator from the side of the European Union in the relations with the Republic of Belarus, Gean-Erick Kholtsapfel "when having favourable coincidence of circumstances that mission will be opened in December 2007". Sure, the role of a mission of that kind is positive and actual. It could improve access to objective information for the population of the country. The EU has been cooperating with a number of Belarusian NGOs and other civil institutions for a certain period of time and is doing now much to increase information flows concerning the activities of the EU aimed at developing dialogue between the West and the East. The new mission of the European Commission in Belarus will convey to Belarusian citizens much information devoted to functioning of different political, legislative, social and administrative institutions established within the framework of the European Union. Even the fact itself of opening such mission in Minsk where the headquarters of the executive bodies of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are

located can be regarded as a symbolic initial friendly step towards warming in the relations between the EU and Belarus.

The Vice-Chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), speaker on Belarus of its political Committee, A. Rigony, came with a short-term visit to Minsk. This can be considered to a certain extent as an original acknowledgement of the so-called multivectoral orientation of the foreign policy of Belarus. It's out of the question, the Belarusian high-level authorities hope that the present day gentle political course under the leadership of the Chairman of the European Commission R. van der Linden, Vice-Chairman A. Rigony enables them to carry out a diplomatic breakthrough and get a status of a specially invited state within the framework of this significant European structure.

We are speaking too much today about vital issues of modern globalization: economical ones: world cooperation and sustainable development of countries of different political systems; political ones: international security and struggle against terrorism; ecological ones and those connected with effective and safe supplies of energy: environmental protection in the context of global warming, development and construction of power plants of a new generation based on the usage of new high technologies. But, first of all, we, Europeans, should keep in mind future regional cooperation, sustainable and innovative development on the European continent. We should unite our forces and strengthen our economic and social positions in order to remain competitive under new economic and social realities of the XXI-st century.

The current position of Belarus, its niche within the European creative model is rather unique. One can speak about a phenomenon of the Belarusian neo-socialism or maybe a particular variant of the eastern real socialism. The Head of the Republic of Belarus gave such definition of the phenomenon as 'a market socialism'. And this appeared to be a starting point while presenting this particular transformational type.

Before the collapse of the former Soviet Union the economic system of Belarus had been actually socialist: planned national economy, distribution of resources, a socialist system of relations of production, rather high ethical norms of labour, educated technical staff, tolerant and hard-working native inhabitants. So, due to these factors the country had been in a better position in comparison with other republics of the Soviet Union. But later on it appeared that the lack of natural resources for making production would characterize a future rating of Belarus as a developed industrial country, more than 90% of those resources were obtained at the post-soviet area. It was the prices for resource commodities that began to increase rapidly. Unfortunately, the economic and political elites didn't want to realize that only structural reforms in the economic sphere, aimed at modernizing the country, first of all, in its important sectors would become favourable and establish the potential of its future development. Of course, it would have resulted in the lack of social benefits for the population. Besides, many people hoped that the assistance and support of Russia would be crucial under such difficult conditions.

The main purpose of that time was establishing a new configuration on the territory of the CIS: the Union of Russia and Belarus with all those resulting circumstances dominated in the minds of the Belarusian elites in power. Surely, some active former communist and Komsomol officials, those bureaucrats, were constantly seeking for comfortable seats and posts within the framework of the new structure. At that time they were not thinking about privatization of national enterprises, flexible investment policy, liberalization and democracy in different fields of the society life. The economic concepts of Marxism were dominating in the socially-oriented society in spite of the fact that outside the country in many European countries were taking place the processes of innovative development.

Recently, for Belarus there have appeared new challenges and risks, related to the problems of ensuring its energy control and, hence, safeguarding of independence and sovereignty. The trouble of the Belarusian authorities is that they haven't used the progressive experiences of the development of neighbour countries in time; until 2007 they had ignored the main characteristics of any reasonable energy policy; haven't applied maximum activity, diversity and foresight.

So, challenges are a comparatively new phenomenon for Belarus. A small country with small open economy, rather homogeneous, both socially and nationally identifiable population shouldn't face, in general, complicated challenges of the mankind. The challenges themselves appear to be, to a greater extent, an indicator of the fact how the elites in Belarus do understand their mission and the role of the country within the regional and continental context. The "new old" elites were not able to recognize and determine a new grouping of forces in Europe. Such neighbour countries, as Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, have become member states of the EU; the Ukraine is planning to enter this integration union as well. And Belarus is standing face to face with a strategic challenge: how to keep and improve its national interests under the conditions of a new external economical, political and military environment.

As the group of independent scientists, including such well-known experts as L. Zaiko, Ya, Romanchuck, have noted, the main strategic challenges for Belarus are presented in the following way:

- Determination of the place of the country within the European and European geopolitical and geo-economics area.
- Competitiveness of the Belarusian economy, state and society.
- The rate of realization at a national level of civilization or global processes (new technologies, information society, way of living)
- Ensuring high indicators of the development of human potential.
- Achievement of high levels of prosperity and security
- Prospects of breakthrough to civilization of knowledge.



And the scientists give the following expert evaluation of them as:

- Within the Euro-Asian and European area we have still “overloaded”, we are in the state of drifting. To a certain extent the leading political elites have declared our national interests, but they are simultaneously articulating them both inconsistently and not clearly for themselves and their own society. In fact, there is no answer to the challenge of our orientation at present and in future.
- Competitiveness of the Belarusian economy had become an apparent problem by the end of the 1990-s. The successes in increasing the indicators of its gross domestic product (GDP) and those of exports have resulted in so ambitious moods when the ambitions dominate over common sense. For the matter of that competitiveness of the national economy is growing both in foreign and home market. Instead of performing radical structural reforms of the national economy the major part of the economic elite being afraid of that particular competitiveness began lobbying protectionism under the slogan of defending the national manufacturer. The state is behaving in the same way. It is gradually forcing out the nongovernmental sector (as a competitor), introduces limits as far as the civil society is concerned. An own competitiveness of the state against neighbour countries is eclipsed by putting forward theses on social stability inside the country, the so-called Belarusian exclusiveness.
- The rate of realization of civilized processes also hasn't become a challenge to elite-leaders of the country. Internet and mobile connection became entering the life of the country. But these are only external signs. Still rather many people are afraid of using new technologies, they haven't got used to new, higher standards

- of living. This concerns mobility of the workforce, formation of service markets, assimilation to new standards of consumption.
- Ensuring development of human potential; aspirations to achieving high levels of prosperity and security are better involved. These challenges are recognized by the population itself, people are increasing their investments into higher education, expenses on buying the Internet services and obtaining the access to satellite TV systems.
  - An actual course to the breakthrough towards civilization of knowledge hasn't been determined yet. This takes place because of the influence of such lobbying groups of the old type as, agrarians, construction workers, directorate. New business groups, the intellectuals are occupying the periphery of political life and of the process of making strategic decisions. It were those debates while discussing the reform of the Higher School and the prospects of the development of Bologna process that clearly showed that particular level of actuality of Belarus's entering the civilization of knowledge and weak efficiency of intellectual lobbying.

Thus, having got the main strategic challenges for Belarus and their brief evaluations, one can say that the current official identification of the country within the European area is simply focused on the statement that Belarus is located in the very centre of Europe. And nothing more significant. That's why both simple people and some specialists are getting used to repeating those nice words about the really beautiful country, the unexpected Belarus with its still thick green forests, blue spots and bands of lakes and rivers, palaces and towers being reconstructed, sad ruins of former power and luxury from the height of the birds' flight. But not many practical steps in the direction of European integration and partnership. What about joining the European Declaration on Tolerance? The Republic of Belarus hasn't signed it yet. Of course, it implies carrying out rules of

international law and respect for human rights. The countries of the European Union seek to promote the values presented in the Declaration in the wider world, to build and share prosperity and to exert their collective influence by acting together on the European and the world stage in order to resist forecasted and unexpected challenges and risks.

Unfortunately, under the official identification of the country given above, not having civil courage and responsibility to begin a constructive dialogue with the democratic and liberal forces inside the country, the Belarusian authorities haven't presented a national model of orientation and sustainable development of the state in a new century.

## THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

The global and regional context plays an important role in Belarus' socio-economic development. Belarus is party to a range of major global initiatives including the Millennium Development Goals set by the 2000 UN Millennium Summit. Aligning Belarusian political and social institutions with the European practices would require further progress towards a socially oriented market economy and a mature democracy. The movement along this path is significantly affected by powerful global trends and developments, such as globalization and regional integration.

Globalization is a dynamic but also a highly controversial and asymmetric process. On the one hand it expands international trade and facilitates investments, technological advancements, and the global exchange of knowledge and ideas. All of these factors can contribute to national economic growth and promote human development. On the other hand globalization sometimes poses challenges to national human development by exacerbating global inequalities. Even as the most powerful economies enjoy an era of prosperity, many developing nations experience increases in poverty levels, diminishing life expectancy, escalating armed conflicts, and declining levels of personal security.

Belarus was perceived as a distant country by the EU before the enlargement of 2004. This is understandable as no then-Member States bordered Belarus and the country was actually seen as a part of Russia by many politicians within the EU. The situation has changed since the enlargement and Belarus has become a direct neighbor of the EU. New Member States, especially Lithuania and Poland – both bordering Belarus – are lobbying for deeper EU engagement in the issue of Belarus. The new political climate is visible, first of all, in the European Parliament, which voted on five resolutions concerning Belarus. In addition, the Council and Commission both pay more attention to Belarus. There are initial symptoms of pro-active policy. For example, the EU decided to support broadcast in Belarus from abroad (the support of the Deutsche Welle program for Belarus and a 2 million euro tender for other programs announced in autumn 2005) and to create the EU Delegation in Minsk.

The special role of Member States (Latvia, Lithuania, Poland) neighboring Belarus is more and more visible. It should be stressed that Lithuania and Poland are much more active than Latvia. Lithuania was interested in Belarus for many years and would like to be considered an expert on Belarus in the EU and therefore propose added value to EU policy towards the country. Poland has also been interested in Belarus from the beginning of 90s and is now deeply involved in the issue of Belarus due to the oppression of the Polish minority by the Lukashenko regime. Both Lithuania and Poland have close contacts with the Belarusian democratic opposition and civil society and Vilnius and Warsaw strongly support the democratization of Belarus. But there are significant differences between Lithuania and Poland in their approach to Minsk. For instance, Lithuania supports informal meetings with the highest officials from Belarus, including Lukashenko (informal meetings between President Valdas Adamkus and Lukashenko on the border or an official meeting of the Lithuanian Prime Minister with his Belarusian counterpart are examples of such approach). Poland, on the other hand, is against such

contacts but supports working meetings with lower representatives of the Belarus regime.

## ECONOMIC REALITIES OF THE TODAY BELARUS. DESIRE TO ENSURE ENERGY SECURITY. UNDERESTIMATION OF THE EUROPEAN VECTOR

As for Belarus, the EU should take note of the indications from the Belarusian government about its willingness to engage in an energy dialogue, following the energy crisis between Belarus and Russia earlier this year. However, the EU should not compromise on its values and should renew the dialogue with Belarus only under clear conditions, as laid out in the EC Non-Paper on Belarus of November 2006, which include release of all political prisoners, assurance of free media, independence of the judiciary and respect for democratic values and for the basic rights of the Belarusian people.

An economic dialogue with the European Union is gradually raising turnovers: the international ratings agency 'Standard & Poor's Ratings Services' has awarded the country certain values of sovereign credit rating; the state packets of shares of the 'Motovelo' plant have been sold to the austrian company 'ATEC' and those ones of the company of mobile connection 'Velcom' to the cyprian company 'SB -Telecom' and then the latter one resold them to one of the austrian companies lately. By the way, without any investment contest. The state authorities are beginning to move towards the way of privatization of the state ownership under the conditions of functioning of the non-democratic political system. And it's dangerous, because there exists a very high probability that such privatization will turn into a simple nomenclature 'prikhvatizatsiya'. The Belarusian officials have spoken too much recently about diversification of the supplies of energy resources, the latter are being found in Venezuela or Iran and at the same time such supplies are not included into those energy projects which are being planned to perform by our neighbour

countries. In spite of the fact that there have appeared some achievements in the economic cooperation with the countries of the EU, underestimation of the European vector in the Belarusian foreign policy and, in general, in the life of the Belarusian society is obvious.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF BUSINESS CLIMATE. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BELARUS FROM THE SIDE OF INTERNATIONAL BODIES TO MOVE MORE ACTIVELY ON THE WAY TOWARDS INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The Republic of Belarus possesses a serious economic potential. Its main constituent parts are: necessary, though limited to certain extents, natural resources and bowels; transport and telecommunication infrastructure; productive base; human capital; intellectual ownership. But, on the whole, nomenclature of the Republican and local levels limit the possibilities of the citizens of the country in the field of realization of their creative potential and personal plans. As a result of significant changes of the global character, first of all, in the energy sector, there is taking place unprecedented price rising for oil and gas

The Belarusian energy sector is facing financial and economic difficulties related to insufficient and inadequate reformation of the Belarusian economy.

We have:

- low payment discipline;
- insufficient transparency of financial flows and some payment patterns; overload with social obligations;
- inadequate motivation and possibilities of management and workers of enterprises in order to raise sufficiency;
- absence of elements of competitiveness;
- high demands for private investments which is impossible to use for the existing state system.

All improvements inside this sector we obtained using the so-called administrative resource, but the possibilities of the latter are not endless. Further price rising for oil and gas will result in subsequent rise of expenses and, consequently, a substantial price rising for gas, heat and electric energy to the consumer. It is the reforms aimed at demonopolization, commercialization, making joint stock and new regulation policy that can provide necessary incentives on rising efficiency of enterprises of this sector and make a future rise of expenses and adaptation to high prices not so painful.

At present there have appeared some few practical steps of changing the business climate within the Republic to the better. On October 16, 2007 in Belarus was held presentation of the seventeenth Report on World Investments in 2007 of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). According to the document two projects are to be realized in Belarus next year. The first project foresees assistance in preparing a review of the investment policy of Belarus, i.e. making objective evaluation of legislative and administrative norms on the issues of foreign investments and working out recommendations on their improvements. Another project is focused on rendering technical assistance in case of joining Belarus to the WTO. Both projects are at the final stage of preparing. The representative of the UNO in Belarus Dj. Sultanoglu stressed: 'I hope that they will open the road to other projects of technical assistance for Belarus from the side of the agencies of the UN system in the field of trade and investments.' In accordance with the classification of UNCTAD Belarus belongs to a category of countries with a high potential for attracting direct foreign investments and takes the forty-seventh position in the rating list, but, unfortunately, according to the rating, prepared for 141 countries, which shows real usage of investments, Belarus takes only the 122 position. The chief department on investments of the Ministry of economy informs that the larger part of

money from abroad comes from Switzerland, Great Britain, Germany and Russia. Both Great Britain and Germany are among the most powerful EU members. So, their positive influence on the development of business climate in Belarus can be very significant. And, in general, the EU is able to maintain close and friendly relations with all its neighbours, including the Republic of Belarus.

## SOME PERSONAL IDEAS CONCERNING STRENGTHENING DIALOGUE BETWEEN BELARUS AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

In my point of view, there should be kept in mind the following:

- Strengthening pragmatic, mutually profitable economic and scientific relations: working out actual programmes of cooperation in the XXI-st century, in particular, in the fields of energy production and distribution, environmental protection and ecological tourism, food production industries ( milk and meat processing ), scientific investigation of the Antarctic continent, space exploring ( what about such an ambitious European project with participation of different EU members and their neighbours, as exploring the Moon resources in counterweight with the plans of China and those being developed by Russia and India? Why not?). The Republic of Belarus possesses a rather high scientific and technical potential, of course, inherited from the achievements of the former Soviet Union. Vital now and in future business and scientific projects in the fields mentioned above, will pay their way.
- In a political sphere. Normal reactions to the ultimatum, made by the leader of the Republic of Belarus. Under new economic conditions in the world and, in particular, in Europe effective economic relations will dominate over certain declarations. In fact, many simple people, businessmen of small and medium-sized



enterprises are for cooperation and partnership with the countries of the EU. As a matter of fact, now both the EU and Belarus should demonstrate their wish to elaborate and use in foreign policy an effective model of future cooperation. One cannot but mention here the examples related to overcoming of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident in Belarus. Many countries of the EU, such as Italy, Great Britain, Spain, Germany and others, have contributed lots to rendering different kinds of assistance, humanitarian aid to Belarus. And the Belarusian people are grateful to them. So, we have got vivid manifestations of friendly human relations. Let the officials from both sides who are dealing with the construction of that model remember such things and use delicately the experiences obtained in their activities in negotiations based on good will and with aspiration to resolve the present situation in the nearest future.

- Working out plans on optimization of the activities of the mission of the European Commission which is to be established in Minsk in the nearest future. It will be wonderful if the officials of this mission are not only high-qualified specialists in the field of international relations and multicultural communications but also people who are fond of sports.
- Working out and carrying out joint more creative programmes in the field of students' and youth' exchanges. Improving the current situations with visa obtaining at the Embassies and Consulates of the EU member-states for simple people of Belarus. In fact, the governmental authorities have done much to set up all modern facilities aimed at performing reliable frontier control on the border with the European Union. Belarusians are waiting for friendly steps from the side of our neighbours from the EU and other European countries.

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