

FOREIGN POLICY

BELARUSIANS ABROAD

In 1991, the Republic of Belarus emerged at the international arena in two capacities, namely, as a new independent state formed through the USSR collapse and as a European country having long-standing traditions of the diplomatic activity. The geographical position of the Belarusian lands has long contributed to the development of contacts with foreign countries. The Republic of Belarus is a historical successor of the Principalities of Polotsk and Turov (9–13 centuries) and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (mid 13–18 centuries), however, the process of building the Belarusian state on a national basis started only in the XX century.

The first attempt of the Belarusian nation to exercise its right to self-determination was the proclamation of the independent Byelorussian People's Republic in 1918. In 1919, an alternative form of the Belarusian statehood emerged — the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic — which was recognized by the RSFSR (1919), Poland (1921) and Germany (1922). After the BSSR joined the USSR in December 1922, its foreign policy powers were actually suspended and were resumed in 1944. The BSSR People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, liquidated in 1923, was restored that year (since 1946, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the BSSR). The BSSR became a co-founder of the United Nations Organization (UN) in 1945 (26.6.1945 among the representatives of 50 states signed the UN Charter).

By the early 1990s, the BSSR had missions to the UN in New York, to the international organizations in Vienna, Geneva and Paris; GDR, Poland and Bulgaria had their Consulates-General in Minsk. The republic signed a number of international treaties within the framework of the UN system. It was a party to 156 international treaties and agreements as of 1988. The BSSR representatives participated in the work of more than 60 inter-governmental organizations and their bodies within the UN system.

The BSSR Supreme Council adopted the Declaration on State Sovereignty on July 27th 1990 and gave it the status of the Constitutional Act on 25th August 1991. Given its sovereign status, the republic was officially re-named into the Republic of Belarus 19 September 1991. The Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus adopted the Declaration On Principles of Foreign Economic Activity 22 October 1991. The Act of Denunciation of the 1922 Union Treaty was signed on December 8th 1991 in Belovezhskaya Pushcha (Viskuly Residence) by the heads of states and governments of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The USSR ceased to exist. From that time on Belarus became an independent sovereign state.

Since the end of December 1991, the process of recognizing the Belarusian state by the international community started. The Republic of Belarus established diplomatic relations with 162 states. In the 1990s, Belarus began to form its diplomatic infrastructure abroad. As of 1.1.2006 it has 64 diplomatic missions and consular posts in 46 countries worldwide, including 44 Embassies, 2 Resident Missions at the international organizations and 6 Consulates-General and 1 Consulate. 10 Branches of the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus function in the regions of the Russian Federation and 1 Branch of the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus — in Germany (Bonn) and 1 — in Kazakhstan (Almaty). 35 Embassies, 17 Consular Posts of foreign states and 12 Resident Missions of international organizations exercise functions in Belarus; 82 Ambassadors of foreign states having dual activity status are accredited in the Republic of Belarus.

The Republic of Belarus signed over 3,000 interstate and intergovernmental international documents as of 2006, of them, 1,330 are multilateral and 1,450 are bilateral.

Our country makes a sizeable contribution to such All-European and regional processes as operation of main transport and energy communications, control of illegal migration and strengthening military, political and world stability. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus pursues the foreign policy based on the multi-vector principle understanding it as absence of geographical constraints in the work and paying equal attention to all regions of the world.

Addressing the Belarusian diplomats at the meeting held in July 2004, the President of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko outlined strategic directions and priorities of the foreign-policy and foreign-economic activities at this stage of the country's development as follows:

- integrating with Russia;
- maintaining strategic neighborly relations with the European Union;
- upholding economic and energy interests within the Commonwealth of Independent States;
- maintaining good-neighborly relations with the NATO;
- promoting economic, financial, technological, military and political cooperation with the USA as the major and indisputable global force center;
- maintaining active and comprehensive relations with Ukraine, Poland and Baltic States;
- expanding export and credit/investment activities in its own interests in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America;
- promoting multilateral diplomacy and participating in international forums, primarily, in the UN, to address an extremely diverse range of problems.

Law No. 60-3 of the Republic of Belarus On Basic Directions of the Foreign and Domestic Policy of the Republic of Belarus was passed on 14 November 2005 to determine principles, strategic goals, main targets and spheres of the domestic and foreign policy of the state.

The Republic of Belarus is the member of such international organizations as the World Meteorological Organization, World Health Organization (WHO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), World Customs Organization, World Trade Organization (observer), World Federation of Trade Unions, Nuclear Suppliers' Group, Nonaligned Movement, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Interpol, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, Inter-national Civil Aviation Organization, International Organization for Migration, International Organization for Standardization, International Labor Organization (ILO), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Finance Corporation (IFC), Multilateral Investments Guarantee Agency (MAGI), International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Olympic Committee, Universal Postal Union, International Telecommunication Union, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), United Nations Organization, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Permanent Arbitration Court, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, Commonwealth of Independent States, Central European Initiative and UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

The Republic of Belarus pursues the consistent policy in the sphere of international security, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and arms elimination, disarmament and arms control. It was the first among the countries — nuclear successors of the former Soviet Union — to renounce nuclear weapons and join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a nuclear-free state and ratify the Treaty on Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START-1) and Lisbon Protocol. In 1995, Belarus signed the IAEA Safeguards Agreement and in 2005 — Additional Protocol to that Agreement. In 1996, Belarus established the Governmental Nuclear Materials Protection, Control and Accounting System. The Republic of Belarus completed the withdrawal of nuclear weapon from its territory in November 1996, joined the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (CCW), Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). In 2000, Belarus was admitted to the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) that was proof of its compliance with the internationally recognized export control standards.

Notwithstanding economic and financial difficulties, subject to the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (TCFE) the Republic of Belarus eliminated nearly 10% of arms and equipment of the total equipment liquidated by all 30 TCFE member-states. It was also the first among the member-states to ratify the Agreement on Adaptation of the TCFE in 2000.

In 2003, the Republic of Belarus joined the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction. Our country fully supports the objectives of the Ottawa Convention and plans to destroy its anti-personnel mines stockpiles before 1 March 2008.

The Republic of Belarus is a bona fide participant of all six major international agreements in the sphere of human rights and eight ILO framework Conventions.

The Republic of Belarus works for constructive international cooperation in the human rights sphere based on principles of mutual respect and equal partnership. It, however, believes that using the human rights issue as a tool of promoting political and economic interests is hopeless. Belarus is open to a constructive and fair dialogue covering the entire range of the human rights issues.

The most critical component of the Belarusian state's activity in the international arena is an economic diplomacy. The Belarusian economy has been for long oriented to external markets. Currently, the share of export in the Belarusian GDP exceeds 60%, over 90% of tractors, trucks, 70% of metal-working machines, refrigerators, chemical fibers and filaments, integrated circuits and semiconductors, and over 50% of TV sets and consumer goods are exported. The growth of the Belarusian export is a key factor for further economic development of the Republic of Belarus. To this end, Belarus seeks to diversify its export to sustain it and reduce vulnerability of the national economy, activate the investment process (primarily, by increasing investments in advanced high-tech export-oriented industries), promote high-tech and science-intensive products to foreign markets and expand export of services. A critical goal of the foreign policy is integration of our country into the world trade system. The Republic of Belarus has the status of an observer in the WTO and conducts negotiations for full-rights membership in this organization (see also the Section Foreign Trade Activity).

The foreign policy of Belarus prioritizes closer relations with Russia. The Treaty on the Formation of Community of Russia and Belarus was signed in Moscow on April 2nd 1996. The Treaty on Union of Belarus and Russia signed on April the 2nd 1997 became a model of the inter-state unification with a higher degree of political and economic integration compared to that of CIS. Signing the Treaty on Formation of a Union State of Belarus and Russia on December 8th 1999 (it entered into force in January 2000) by the Presidents of Belarus and Russia became a next step toward the unification between the states. Provisions of the Treaty provided for joint actions of two states for drawing closer and unifying their legal, economic, financial, customs and other systems, and developing interstate power structures to establish the Union State.

Currently, the Parties are in the process of finalizing the Draft Constitutional Act of the Union State and negotiating the issues of introducing the common currency. Substantial efforts were contributed to unify legislations of the Republic of Belarus and Russian Federation. Currently, many provisions of the Civil Code and Civil Procedure Code are similar to those of the respective legal acts of the Russian Federation. Acts of law of the Economic Procedure Code of the Republic of Belarus and Arbitration Procedure Code of the Russian Federation have been pre-dominantly unified and are not contradictory. Substantial input was made to unify and harmonize the customs legislation and legal frame-works in the banking sphere.

The agreements regarding regulation of the legal status of the property of the Union State and providing equal rights to the citizens of Belarus and Russia are being drafted. The Supreme State Council, the Council of Ministers and the Permanent Committee of the Union State have been formed and are functional. The Border and Customs Committees and the TV and Radio Broadcasting Organization of the Union State have been set up. Joint Boards of the ministries and other national bodies of state administration of Belarus and Russia are functioning. The

Union State Treaty, however, provides for not a mechanical merger of two states or absorption of one state by the other, but their unification to attain the results being mutually beneficial for the both Parties, provided that Belarus and Russia maintain the status of the subjects of International Law.

The Agreements of Union Property and Equal Rights of Citizens to Freedom of Movement, Agreement of Cooperation in Social Security Field and Intergovernmental Agreement of Procedure of Providing Medical Care to Russia Citizens in Healthcare Facilities of Belarus and Belarusian Citizens in Healthcare Facilities of Russia was signed in January 2006 at the sitting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State in Saint-Petersburg. The agreements reached are clear indication of the fact that the Union State has been established not for some political transitory goals, but for the citizens of Belarus and Russia and that the Union State efficiently addresses these targets.

Economic relations serve as a foundation for implementing the Belarusian-Russian integration project. Russia is the major foreign trade partner of the Republic of Belarus and consumer of the products manufactured by the Belarusian companies, its share in the Belarusian foreign trade makes up over 50%. While in the mid-1990s the Belarus-Russia turnover amounted to USD 5 billion, in 2005, — USD 16 billion. The Republic of Belarus supplies high-tech products and agricultural produces to the Russia's market and serves as the most important transport and transit corridor linking Russia with the European countries. Russia supplies mainly the raw materials, energy and components to our country. Currently, over 8 thousand Belarusian and Russian enterprises supply products to each other on a contractual basis. The countries upgrade their cooperation by establishing large market financial and economic businesses and lay foundation for a unified economy regulation system at the macrolevel. The first string of the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline was commissioned and the second one is to be constructed.

A significant expansion of Belarus-Russia relations at the regional level is observed. The Republic of Belarus maintains mutually beneficial trade and economic, scientific and technological and cultural relations with 80 Russian regions out of 89. The contractual basis of the bilateral cooperation at the regional level includes over 170 treaties, agreements and protocols on trade and economic, scientific and technical and cultural cooperation. 12 bilateral Councils and Commissions of cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and Administrations of the Russia's regions (Kaliningradskaya, Leningradskaya, Rostovskaya, Moscovskaya, Bryanskaya, Ivanovskaya and Kurskaya Provinces, Republics of Sakha (Yakutiya) and Chuvashiya, Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and Altai Krai) have been established and are functioning. 8 Representative Offices of the following Russian regions' Administrations are available in Belarus: Dagestan, Ingushetiya, Altaysky, Krasnodarsky Krai, Kaliningradskaya, Nizhnegorodskaya, Chitinskaya and Yaroslavskaya Provinces. Tatarstan, Chuvashiya and Murmanskaya Provinces plan to establish their Representative Offices in Belarus. Belarus maintains the closest relations with Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Tyumenskaya, Moscovskaya and Smolenskaya Provinces accounting for nearly 70% of the Belarusian-Russian turnover.

The year of 2005 was not an ordinary one for trade and economic relations between Belarus and Russia due to change over to a new principle of collecting VAT. The restructuring of taxation systems resulted in some decline of the trade and economic turnover between our countries: in 2004 it amounted to USD 18 billion and in 2005 USD 16 billion. In general, however, implementation of a more progressive taxation method resulted in elimination of "gray" schemes that existed between the economy entities and in improvement of the export-import ratio in the mutual trade. Therefore, despite a painful process of restructuring in 2005, a new strategic foundation laid creates conditions for expanding trade and relations.

To improve efficiency of direct relations between regions, sectors and enterprises of both countries, the following is prioritized: to promote impeccable and efficient organization of visits of the Russian Federation's delegations of various levels to the Republic of Belarus, holding

bilateral and multilateral business meetings, sittings, negotiations and other events; to establish stable relations with the Belarusian Chamber of Trade and Commerce and its Branches by annually organizing and holding the Days of the Business Cooperation Between Provinces of the Russian Federation and Regions of the Republic of Belarus; to expand information support to the Russia's participants of the interregional cooperation, inclusive of the use of Internet; to improve the forms of Russia-Belarus cooperation in the sphere of arranging exhibitions and fairs; and to streamline the development of the legal framework of cooperation of the Russia's regions with the Be-larusian Party, including preparation of bilateral cooperation agreements.

The First Belarusian-Russian Economic Forum was held in Minsk 6–9 September 2005. The Forum was attended by the Chairman of the Supreme State Council of the Union State, the President of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko, Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus S.S. Sidorsky, Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation M.E. Fradkov, representatives of the governmental, business and scientific community of both countries, diplomatic missions and international organizations accredited in Belarus. The Forum discussed the issues of the trade and economic cooperation, investment, common trade, customs and tariff policy, common labor market, common scientific and technical space, unified transportation system and other issues.

The cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and Russian Federation in the military sphere provides for pursuance of a common defense policy, coordination of actions in the sphere of military development, drawing-up and placement of a joint defense order, functioning of the regional military forces grouping and other actions. 30 military/military and technical cooperation agreements in various spheres were concluded between the Republic of Belarus and Russian Federation. The military infrastructure facilities are jointly used in the interests of the regional military forces grouping in the Republic of Belarus. The cooperation between military departments encompasses actually the entire range of military issues, is characterized by an active development and is based on equality and mutual benefit principles. The Military Doctrine of the Union State providing for establishment of the Union State's military organization was adopted in December 2001.

Belarus and Russia coordinate their actions in the international arena. In 2004–2005, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the two countries held more than 80 rounds of consultations dealing with various topics. The cooperation of Belarusian and Russian diplomats allows them to actually move from coordinating foreign affairs actions on the international arena toward agreeing such steps, i.e. toward a higher degree of understanding. In February 2006, the Union State's bodies approved the next Program of concerted actions in the foreign policy sphere for 2007.

The Belarus-Russia Union has not only predetermined the destiny of two nations, but also has become geopolitical reality, a focus of attraction and an example of free, equal and mutually beneficial cooperation of sovereign states within the FSU boundaries.

The Republic of Belarus also seeks to maintain friendly relations with other neighboring countries — Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In the 1990s, Belarus signed political treaties and agreements on the state border with the above states to define the framework of relations with them and legalized the territorial status quo. The contractual basis formed over the last years actually covers all spheres of cooperation between Belarus and neighboring countries. In the beginning of the current decade, the Republic of Belarus worked jointly with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia to bring the contractual basis (primarily agreements on mutual travels of citizens and trade and economic cooperation agreements) in compliance with the EU standards, with integration of the above countries into the European structures being accounted. Poland, Latvia and Lithuania are still of critical importance for Belarus as foreign-trade and investment partners. Participation of the Belarusian business community in the International Economic Forums annually held in Krynitsa (Poland) is a vivid example of a constructive interaction of neighboring states. The Belarusian businessmen participated in the regular (15th) International Economic Forum held 7–10 September 2005. The opportunities of developing the Belarusian-

Polish trade, economic and investment cooperation, prospects of further work of the Belarusian-Polish Joint Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation and capacities of implementing a number of joint Belarusian-Polish projects were discussed at negotiations with Polish partners. Belarus cooperates with the neighboring states both on bilateral basis and within the framework of the following Euroregions: Bug, Neman, Belovezhskaya Pushcha and Ozerny Krai.

Timely understanding of problems posed by joining EU by Lithuania, Latvia and Poland (restrained relations in the trade and economic sphere, tightened regimes of border crossing, etc.) and intention of all the parties involved to address them on a constructive basis contributed to minimization of the negative impact related to the EU eastward expansion.

The Republic of Belarus gives high priority to the development of constructive relations with all European countries, many of which (Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Sweden, Czech Republic and others) are among its most important foreign-trade partners or to form one of the major sources of hard currency proceeds, advanced technologies, and credit and investment resources. It should be noted that Belarus seeks to comprehensively develop relations with EU which could in perspective comprise free trade and other forms of interaction meeting the interests of the parties. In 2003, the Republic of Belarus supported the “neighborly” initiative proposed by the EU agencies for the countries not having immediate prospects of joining the EU. The Belarusian Party became involved in three “neighborly programs” with the EU aimed at developing regional cooperation along the Belarusian western border on the basis of the EU financial assistance instruments, but those programs were not implemented in full. The neighborhood with the European Union is of strategic importance for Belarus, since currently it is the second trade partner of our country to Russia. Belarus, in its turn, is a key transit country for the EU, across the territory of which runs the shortest way from Europe to Russia. The most acute problems of illegal migration, people trade, drug traffic, and security of frontiers the EU faces cannot be solved without Belarus.

The leaders of the Republic of Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine signed the Agreement on the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on December 8th 1991 in Viskuly (Belovezh-skaya Pushcha). The Heads of 11 sovereign states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine) signed the Protocol to this Agreement on December 21st 1991 in which they stressed that the new independent states form the Commonwealth of Independent States on the basis of equality. Georgia joined the CIS in 1993.

The Commonwealth of Independent States is not a state and is not empowered with supranational authorities. The CIS countries coordinate their activities through the respective coordinating institutions: Council of Heads of States, Council of Heads of Governments, Executive Secretariat, Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, Interstate Economic Committee of Economic Union and others. In 1992–1993, the CIS Council of Heads of States and Council of Heads of Governments adopted the documents at their meetings establishing the CIS legal framework. 22 January 1993, the Council of Heads of State adopted the Charter governing the CIS activities. In January 1994, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus ratified the CIS Charter.

24 September 1993, the Heads of 9 CIS countries signed the Treaty on Establishment of the Economic Union. Georgia and Turkmenistan became its full members in December 1993 and Ukraine joined it as an associated member 15 April 1994.

In March 1994, the UN General Assembly granted the observer status to the CIS. The UNCTAD Council for Trade and Development granted the similar status to the CIS (19 April 1994). 5 May 1994, the Cooperation Agreement was signed between the UNCTAD Secretariat and CIS Executive Secretariat.

2 April 1999, the CIS Council of Heads of States took a decision to reorganize the CIS Executive Secretariat, the Interstate Economic Committee machine, working machines of the interstate and intergovernmental sectoral bodies into a single permanently acting body — Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The CIS Council of Heads

of States approved the regulation on the CIS Executive Committee by the Protocol of 21 June 2000.

Minsk is the seat of the CIS Executive Committee, Moscow is the seat of the Interstate Economic Committee and Saint Petersburg — the seat of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly.

By the end of the 1990s, groups of states pursuing their own interests emerged within the CIS: Belarus-Russia Union, Central Asian Union and others. The CIS legalized the non-uniform integration rate concept, which, however, led it to the crisis. Nevertheless, the CIS countries' leaders deemed it reasonable to maintain the CIS, but to reform it to enhance efficiency.

In the current decade, the most pressing issues of cooperation between the CIS countries include as follows: establishing and strengthening economic relations, taking actions against propagation of drugs and psycho-tropic substances, jointly controlling crime and international terrorism, forming a common information space and cooperating in the energy sphere. A special attention is focused on addressing the future problems of developing a free trade zone. Nearly 300 million people reside in the CIS, however, only 30–40% of the market capacity is used. In September 2003, the meeting of the Council of Heads of States adopted the documents that provided for implementation of a package of actions to increase the CIS countries' cooperation efficiency in the economic sphere up to 2010 and called to finally establish the free trade zone. The next step toward establishing the free trade zone was made at the meeting of the Council of Heads of Governments of the CIS country-members in Tbilisi in June 2005 where the Protocol on stepwise cancellation of limits in Trade between CIS countries was signed. The efforts taken by the CIS countries yielded positive results: in 2004, the mutual trade of the CIS member states increased by 40% compared to the previous year.

In January 2005, the possible parameters of reforming the CIS were collectively discussed for the first time at the meeting of representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the CIS member states.

Reforming and improving the CIS bodies became one of the focal issues of the agenda at the meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of States in Kazan in August 2005. The meeting participants supported the proposal on establishing the High-Level Group within the CIS similar to the UN Wise Men Group. The Heads of states signed the Agreement on Cooperation in the Sphere of the Humanities. The Council of Humanitarian Cooperation established subject to this Agreement was instructed to address conceptual issues, identify priorities and forms of cooperation needed to solve specific problems in the humanitarian sphere. The meeting also approved a package of documents related to joint actions in the sphere of antiterror and illegal migration control, adopted the Military Cooperation Concept up to 2010, Concept of Frontier Policy Coordination of the CIS member-states and passed the Protocol on Approval of the Regulation of Cooperation of the Commonwealth Frontier and Other Departments in Providing Assistance in Case of Emergence of and in Resolving (Liquidating) Crisis Situations along External Frontiers.

Some of the CIS countries took actions to establish closer relations in the economy and security spheres within the framework of the non-uniform integration rate concept.

The Meeting of the CIS Council of Foreign Ministers held in Moscow on April 21st 2006 has approved and passed the draft Agreements of Humanitarian Cooperation Council and Interstate Treaty of Establishing the Interstate Humanitarian Cooperation Development Fund, the programs of cultural exchange between the CIS countries up to 2010 and approved decisions related to the joint actions including the struggle against infringements of the intellectual property law.

On 6 January 1995, the Republic of Belarus and Russian Federation signed the Customs Union Agreement. Kazakhstan joined that Agreement 20 January 1995. 29 March 1996, the Republic of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russian Federation signed the Treaty on Deepening Integration in Economic and Humanitarian Fields. Tajikistan joined the Treaty on Enhancing Integration in Economic and Humanitarian Spheres in February 1999.

26 February 1999, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan signed the Treaty on Customs Union and Common Economic Space. 23 May 2000, the Interstate Council of the EuroAzEC-5 took a decision to form the international economic organization to perform functions related to joining the WTO, forming customs borders and formulating common foreign economic policy.

10 October 2000, the Presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan signed the Treaty on Establishment of the Eurasian Economic Community (EuroAzEC) in Astana. In 2001, once all the necessary procedures were finalized, the EuroAzEC statutory documents entered into force. Since May 2002, Moldova and Ukraine and since April 2003 Armenia were granted the observer status in the EuroAzEC.

6 May 2003, the UN Secretariat registered the Treaty of Establishment the Eurasian Economic Community. The Community is intended to meet the emerged needs in a closer approximation and unification of national laws, in taking actions aimed at increasing the total economic potential of the member-states and agreed restructuring of their economies. The new forms and mechanisms of interactions designed within its framework are aimed at finalizing the Customs Union formation and developing a common economic space.

The following administrative bodies were established and are efficiently functioning within the EuroAzEC: Interstate Council (it comprises the CIS Heads of States and Heads of Governments), Community Integration Committee — a permanent Community body (comprises the Deputies Heads of States), Inter-Parliamentary Assembly — parliamentary cooperation body, Commission of the Permanent Representatives, Community Court, and Community Secretariat headed by the Secretary-General. The Council on Transport Policy, Energy Policy Council, Investment Policy Council, Council of Ministers of Justice, Council of Heads of Tax Administrations, Council of the Heads of Customs Services, Council of the Heads of Central (National) Banks, and Council of Mutual Recognition and Equivalence of Education, Academic Degrees and Titles efficiently function at the level of the Heads of respective ministries and departments. In 2005, a new body — Council comprising finance and economy ministers of the EuroAzEC member-states — was formed within the Community.

The EuroAzEC is specifically characterized by the formula of a compulsory participation in the activity of organization and its bodies, clear international personality, more efficient mechanism of decision making and control over decision implementation, a new budgeting system, distribution of votes in taking decisions accounting the economic influence of the CIS member-countries.

The EuroAzEC budget is formed through contributions with the following breakdown: Russian Federation — 40%, Belarus and Kazakhstan — 20% each, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan — 10% each. Hence, when taking decisions in the Integration Committee, Russia has 40 votes, Belarus and Kazakhstan — 20 each and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan — 10 each. Decisions of the Interstate Council are taken by consensus and are compulsory with respect to all Community members.

The CIS prioritized the following problems to be addressed: introducing common tariffs, increasing the freight traffic, streamlining customs procedures, finalizing intrastate procedures with respect to the agreements signed, establishing transnational territorial and forwarding corporations, jointly developing hydropower complexes in Central Asia, power supply and water use capacities, reaching the common energy balance, harmonizing the agricultural policy, establishing the common foods market, reducing agricultural produces transportation, storage and sales expenses, and developing new market institutions in the agribusiness sector. It is proposed to establish an efficient system for regulating and controlling the labor migration, combating crime that accompanies the migration and paying taxes by the migrants and their employers. Specific actions are taken to more fully meet the needs of the community in the spheres of culture, healthcare and social rights protection. In 2005, of 78 agreements concluded within the EuroAzEC framework, 66 were actually underway, while remaining 12 were in the process of the intrastate agreement.

At the last (13th) meeting of the EuroAzEC Interstate Council held in Moscow in June 2005, over 20 issues were discussed including the status of integration processes within the CIS, formation of the common customs tariff, coordination of positions of the EuroAzEC member-states at negotiations for joining the WTO, the Draft Concept of cooperation in the currency sphere, Agreement on Cooperation in the Sphere of Establishing the Integrated Currency Market and Agreement on Cooperation of Frontier Departments in case of Occurrence of Crisis Situations along the External Borders, and Procedure of Agreeing Main Macroeconomic Indicators of the Member-States' Economy Development.

In April 2002, the Secretariat initiated establishment of the EuroAzEC Association Business Council. In February 2003, the 1st Economic EuroAzEC Forum as a form of cooperation between business and entrepreneurial communities of the member-countries was held by the Integration Committee jointly with the EuroAzEC Association Business Council on initiative of the Interstate Council.

In 2005, the Russia-Kazakhstan Bank was established to perform the functions of the EuroAzEC Interstate Bank.

In June 2005, the President of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko was elected the Chairman of the Interstate Council of the Eurasian Economic Community.

President A.G. Lukashenko, as the Interstate Council Chairman, put forward a proposal to the Heads of the EuroAzEC member-states to finalize the contractual basis of the Customs Union before the end of 2006, draft a bill and pass the law on priority of the EuroAzEC decisions and mandatory compliance with the provisions of the agreed and approved documents by all organization members. The Head of the Belarusian State supported the initiative of the RF President V.V. Putin regarding peaceful use of nuclear energy within the EuroAzEC framework which was put forward at the special sitting of the EuroAzEC Interstate Council in Saint-Petersburg in January 2006 and proposed that it should be supplemented with other initiatives, for example, holding the EuroAzEC Olympics.

In October 2005, the Euroasian Economic Community and Central Asia Cooperation Organization merged into a single structure. This decision is an evidence that the EuroAzEC is the most dynamically developing integration union within the framework of the FSU and its real prestige as an international regional organization is rising.

The Republic of Belarus possessing the developed industrial potential, with the process industries being dominant, prioritizes its involvement in the Eurasian Economic Community. Belarus exports its traditional products to the EuroAzEC-5 countries comprising as follows: tractors, trucks, refrigerators, pharmaceuticals, furniture and so forth. The bulk of the import from the Community includes the following raw materials the Belarusian industry needs: grain, acyclic hydrocarbons, tobacco raw materials, aluminum wire, wool and cotton fiber.

Our country attributes great importance to coordination of actions of the EuroAzEC member-states to join the World Trade Organization. Belarus adheres to the opinion that processes of forming the Customs Union within the framework of the "Six" and joining the WTO by these states should proceed simultaneously. It is of critical importance for the Community States not to lose neighboring markets upon integrating into the global trade system. Therefore, the Financial and Economic Policy Council of the EuroAzEC member-states took a decision to prepare the entire package of documents serving as a basis of the EuroAzEC Customs Union in the near future. Admittance of these states to the WTO conditions the signing of these documents which is likely to take place at the end of 2007.

On May 15th 1992, the Collective Security Treaty (CST) of the CIS countries was signed in Tashkent. Initially, the following CIS countries joined the Treaty: Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. Later, Azerbaijan (24.9.1993), Georgia (9.12.1993) and Belarus (31.12.1993) joined the Treaty.

In February 2004, the decision was taken to form special task forces to neutralize terrorist organizations, control the drug traffic, and block channels of illegal arms traffic.

The main spheres of work of the Organization include political cooperation, improvement of the military component and formulating joint actions to counteract common provocations and threats.

The major line of the Organization's activity is the military and technical cooperation of the CSTO countries based on multilateral and bilateral agreements. To further integrate in the sphere of arming and providing the state-of-the-art equipment, the decision on supplying the Russian armaments to the CSTO states was taken in April 2003.

The last CSTO session held 23 June 2005 in Moscow approved priority directions of the CSTO activity in the second half of 2005 — first half of 2006, the plan of main actions to comprehensively strengthen the inter-national cooperation, develop and build up the collective security system within the CSTO framework for 2006–2010; signed the Agreement of Training Military Personnel, took the decision on establishing the Inter-state Commission for Military and Economic Cooperation and reached agreement on establishing a special agency to counter illegal drug traffic.

The main sphere of the CSTO activity is to integrate it into the common architecture of the international security, establish and strengthen comprehensive cooperation with other organizations involved in this sphere.

Belarus considers full involvement in the CSTO activity not only as the priority to safeguard its national security, but as an important tool for strengthening stability in the FSU. The Organization offers unique opportunities for military and political and military technical cooperation of the participant-countries. Participating in the CSTO, the Republic of Belarus prioritizes the western direction. Belarus is interested in building-up a dialog of the CSTO with all organizations working in the sphere of the international security on the European continent, primarily, with the OSCE, NATO and European Union.

Cooperation of the Republic of Belarus with the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) uniting all European countries, CIS countries, USA and Canada began in January 1992 when Belarus became the member of this organization. After joining the OSCE, Belarus became a party to such fundamental documents as the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and Charter of Paris for a New Europe of 1990.

The Republic of Belarus actively participates in drawing up OSCE documents and taking decisions, thereby contributing to the development of the European dialog on the cooperation and security issues in the OSCE region.

Belarus participates in the activity of the organization within the framework of the OSCE Permanent Council, Forum for Cooperation in Security Sphere, Agreement on Conventional Forces in Europe and Open Sky Consultative Commission and also by practically implementing the principles and mechanisms embodied in the fundamental OSCE documents.

In November 1999, the Belarusian Government delegation headed by the President of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko participated in the OSCE Istanbul Summit of the Heads of the Member-States at which the Charter for European Security, Agreement on Adaptation, Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and Declaration were signed.

Since February 2003, the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus competently participates in the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly that contributed to the broader dialogue between Belarus and OSCE at the Parliamentary level. The cooperation of the Republic of Belarus with the OSCE Secretariat and institutions, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, and Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities has been intensified in the recent years.

M. Svetitsky, Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, H. Conrad, OSCE Special Representative in Combating of Trafficking in Human Beings, M. Harasty, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, and C. Strohal, OSCE ODIHR Director, visited the Republic of Belarus in 2004–2005. The OSCE Secretary General Mark Perren de Brishambo attended the International Chernobyl Conference in Minsk in April 2006.

The Belarusian representatives participate in the sittings of the Minsk Group within the framework of negotiations for preparing the OSCE Minsk Conference on Peaceful Settlement in Nagorny Karabakh and work in the OSCE missions and representations in Macedonia, Moldova and Tajikistan.

Contacts with the Organization Field Presence in Minsk are an important component of cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and OSCE.

From 1998 to 2002, the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) worked in Belarus. 30 December 2002, the Permanent Council of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe took a decision to close the OSCE AMG in Belarus and open the OSCE Office in Minsk since 1 January 2003. The respective Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the OSCE and Belarus. Subject to the above decision, the main objective of the Office is to assist the Government of the Republic of Belarus in the spheres agreed upon between Belarus and OSCE, specifically, the institutional capacity building-up, civil society development, economy and environmental protection. The Minsk OSCE Office prioritizes the project implementation activity aimed at addressing specific problems in the sphere of economic, ecological and human dimensions and also in other agreed spheres.

Belarus actively supports the priority role of the OSCE stipulated in the European Security Charter in dispute settlement in the region of its responsibility based on respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the member states and seeks equal security of the states being in or out of the military alliances.

Participation in the OSCE activities meets the national interests of Belarus. Belarus stands for further evolution of the OSCE, for further re-forming the structures and methods of the OSCE operations, searching for new mechanisms and opportunities of cooperation, with its fundamental principles embodied in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, primarily, the principle of consensus in decision-making, being maintained.

The Republic of Belarus attributes great importance to further strengthening the politico-military and economic and ecological dimensions of the OSCE to develop the comprehensive security system. The Belarusian diplomacy actively participated in developing the new OSCE Strategy Document in the sphere of economic and ecological dimension in 2003.

Belarus believes that adoption of the Charter of the OSCE and transforming it into a true international organization, development of the procedure rules which remained unchanged since 1973 and restructuring the Secretariat to comply with the current practice and priorities of the OSCE activities would contribute to the increased efficiency of the Organization.

Belarus proposes to refocus the OSCE objective from traditional lines of activity to counteracting new security challenges and threats, namely, terrorism, all types of trafficking, illegal migration and also to establish cooperation in the frontier security sphere.

In 2004, the Republic of Belarus joined the Declaration Regarding the State of Affairs in OSCE of the CIS Heads of States and Appeal of the CIS Foreign Ministers to the OSCE counterparts regarding the need of adjusting the activity of the Organization and eliminating the existing drawbacks.

Based on the initiative of a number of CIS countries and the Report of specially established Wise Men Group, the OSCE Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Lublana in 2005 determined the list of main directions — "road map" — subject to which the OSCE is being reformed in 2006. To consider the reform issues, the current Chairmanship of the OSCE established a number of working structures, one of which — the Working Group On Strengthening the Consultation Processes within OSCE — was headed by the Belarusian representative.

The Republic of Belarus also consistently stands for revision of the ODIHR operation methods. Belarus proposed to conduct a comparative analysis of electoral legislations and practices of all OSCE member states, improve observance methods and also work out common criteria of the election assessment.

Guided by the principles of openness and respective provisions of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document, Belarus invited the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to observe the 2006 presidential election. Regardless of serious claims to the ODIHR objectivity and methods of work, the Belarusian authorities constructively cooperated with the ODIHR mission and created all the necessary conditions for its operation.

In June 1996, the Republic of Belarus was admitted to the organization of the Central European Initiative (CEI) that contributed to the extension of its relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Belarusian representatives actively participate in the work of the CEI structures (meetings of the Heads of Governments and Foreign Ministers of the CEI countries, sittings of the National Coordinators Committee, meetings of political directors and in the work of a number of sectoral Working Groups). Since 1998, Belarus annually participates in the CEI Economic Forums.

Belarus is interested to intensify efforts of the CEI member-countries in developing bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation and controlling illegal migration and other types of transboundary crime and believes that the organization's experience in the sphere of strengthening regional relations, eliminating barriers and promoting integration processes on the European continent should be capitalized by the European Union for implementing its "good neighbor policy".

Cooperation between the NATO and Belarus started to develop since 1992. Belarus became a member of the North-Atlantic Partnership Council (since 1997 — Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council) and the Belarusian parliamentarians participated in the sessions of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. The Belarusian delegations participated in the sittings of the NATO Military Committee. In January 1995, the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Belarus V. Senko signed the document of the NATO's Partnership for Peace Program in Brussels and, in May 1996, the Individual Partnership Program (IPP) between the Republic of Belarus and NATO was drawn up. In 1997, the possibility of signing the bilateral Belarus-NATO Charter was discussed. In April 1998, the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus to NATO began officially its work and V.A. Labunov, Ambassador of Belarus to Belgium, was appointed a Permanent Representative of the Republic of Belarus to NATO. The issues of establishing the NATO Information Center in Minsk were also discussed that year. Belarus always considered the process of the NATO expansion as erroneous, while underlining that joining the Alliance by the East-European states is their own domestic concern. At the same time, Belarus supported the idea of developing the general security system model for Europe without new division lines. The Belarusian authorities considered that the process of the NATO expansion should proceed in such a way so that the interests of Russia and other CIS countries were accounted in a compulsory manner. Belarus consistently opposed the deployment of nuclear weapons on the territory of new NATO members. In December 1998, the 53rd General Assembly passed the Regional Disarmament Resolution, with the Belarusian proposal to form a nuclear-free space in the Central and East Europe serving as its basis. In February 1999, the President of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko pointed out that Belarus was a nuclear-free state and it had no intention to return the nuclear weapons to its territory.

In spring 1999, after the NATO aggression was unleashed against Yugoslavia, Belarus suspended cooperation with the NATO. At the end of 1999, the contacts were resumed.

26 March 2001, Belarus, at the meeting of delegations of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, reaffirmed its basic position that the Alliance expansion was an erroneous move under conditions of the Warsaw Pact self-dissolvment and underlined that the country was concerned that the border with NATO would become rather a line of trust and neighborly relations and not a division line.

In December 2001, at the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council session, Belarus stated its solidarity with the international community in struggle against terrorism and the need to establish

an effective system to counter organized trans-border crime, illegal migration and drug trafficking.

In 2002, the NATO Council approved the Individual Partnership Pro-gram (IPP) between the Republic of Belarus and NATO which included 19 directions of cooperation with the Alliance.

The IPP for Belarus prioritizes the cooperation in such spheres as liquidating consequences of the emergencies and disasters, managing crisis situations, language training, small arms and light armament, and democratic control over the armed forces and defense structures.

In its foreign policy, Belarus prioritizes cooperation with the United Nations Organization to take full advantages of opportunities the multi-lateral diplomacy offers.

The delegations of the Republic of Belarus permanently participate in regular and special sessions of the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council and other main UN bodies. The Belarusian diplomacy up-holds national interests in strengthening the UN role in maintaining the international peace and security, building up the UN capacity in solving local military conflicts and disputes, overcoming current global social, economic and ecological problems, and controlling transboundary crime and other challenges of modern times. A constructive cooperation with the UN has been established in the sphere of protecting human rights and combining efforts of all states to overcome such problems as poverty, famine, gender inequality, racial discrimination, social insecurity and religious intolerance.

Realizing that globalization would inevitably influence the countries worldwide, Belarus actively stands for strengthening the UN leading role in building the fair international economic order to protect primarily poor and developing countries and develop an enabling internal and external environment for a sustainable development of the economies in transition.

Belarus actively cooperates with the UN operative activities agencies that provide an extensive technical assistance to it to promote the development.

11 UN program missions, agencies and organizations function in Belarus: UN Development Program (UNDP), Department of Public Information, UN Children's Fund, International Labor Organization, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Joint UN Program on HIV/AIDS, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, International Finance Corporation, World Health Organization, and United Nations Population Fund.

Taking an active stand within the framework of its participation in the activity of the UN agencies, the Republic of Belarus is represented in 14 elective bodies of the UN agencies and is a member of over 50 specialized agencies of the United Nations. Subject to the UNDP Third Country Co-operation Program for Belarus for 2006–2010, a number of projects are to be implemented in the country worth of about USD 33 million in the spheres of education, healthcare and liquidation of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster aftermath.

Belarus places great hopes in reforming the Organization to increase the UN potential in addressing modern challenges and threats. Our country stands for intensification of activity of the UN General Assembly as the Organization's main deliberative body where each state may voice its opinion and be heard. The Republic of Belarus prioritizes reforms in the development sphere to enhance the UN role in the global economic processes. The Republic of Belarus is actively involved in the process of transforming the Economic and Social Council, reforming activities of various bodies, funds and programs of the UN system which provide the technical assistance to the recipient countries. Belarus supports efforts aimed at reforming the UN activity to limit opportunities for specific countries to use the advocacy issue within the UN framework to address problems of bilateral relations. The Republic of Belarus stands for improving the efficiency of the UN Security Council. The key element of the reform is to expand the Council in both categories, with the interests of all regional groups being accounted on a consensus basis.

In September 2005, the Belarusian state delegation headed by the President of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenko participated in the special plenary meeting of the 60th UN General Assembly session.

Speaking from the UN rostrum, the President of the Republic of Belarus stated the position of Belarus with respect to global challenges and changes, put forward the initiatives of recognizing the diversified ways of progressive development and strengthening actions against human traffic, specifically by bringing the consumers of “human slaves” to account. At the Summit, the Head of the Belarusian state signed the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism and had meetings with the Presidents of Iraq and Iran.

The members of the governmental delegation of the Republic of Belarus voiced the position on various aspects of the UN activity at the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly. The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Belarus S.N. Martynov, Head of the Governmental delegation of the Republic of Belarus, had negotiations with the Foreign Ministers of Vietnam, Panama, Iraq, Iran, Mauritius, Egypt, Pakistan, Venezuela, Cuba, Peru, Palestine, Indonesia and Libya, with the Thailand Deputy Prime Minister, Special Representative of the Belgium Government for Issues of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), UN Development Program Administrator, Chairman of the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly, and participated in the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Non-Alignment Movement.

The Republic of Belarus attributes great importance to developing mutually beneficial cooperation with the leading international economic and financial institutions, namely, with the IMF, World Bank Group and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Cooperation with the international economic and financial institutions would promote trust to the country from potential investors and formation of a favorable investment image to attract resources to the economy of the Republic of Belarus from various sources both on multilateral and bilateral basis.

A number of critical investment projects in the power-engineering sector, food industry, banking sector and others are being implemented in the Republic of Belarus with involvement of the leading international financial institutions.

BELARUSIANS ABROAD

An integral part of the Belarusian nation is countrymen residing out-side the Republic of Belarus. Nearly 3.5 million Belarusians lived outside the Republic of Belarus at the late XX and XXI centuries, of them, 2 million — in the FSU republics. The specific feature related to the Belarusian population residing the frontier areas of the neighboring states (Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland) is that these regions formed a part of the Belarusian state in different historical periods, therefore, the Belarusians residing there are autochthons and not a classical Diaspora.

In the 1990s, the gross of the Belarusians resided in the neighboring countries: Russia (over 1 million), Ukraine (400–420 thousand), and Poland (250–400 thousand). Quite a few Belarusians resided in Kazakhstan (112 thousand), Latvia (about 100 thousand), Lithuania (about 55 thousand), and Estonia (about 25 thousand). According to unofficial data, nearly 500 thousand Belarusians resided in the USA, about 100 thousand — in Canada, tens of thousands — in Argentine, Brasilia, France, Belgium, Great Britain, and Australia. Nearly 120–140 thousand natives of Belarus resided in Israel. The population of Belarusians in the CIS and Baltic states started decreasing, while more Belarusian citizens immigrated to Europe, USA and Canada.

Prior to the early 1990s, Belarusians organizations functioned in Australia, Great Britain, Canada, Poland and the USA. In 1992–2005, the organizations, uniting the Belarusians and natives of Belarus emerged also in Armenia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Israel, Spain, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, the Netherlands, Russia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, France, Czech Republic, Sweden, and Estonia.

The modern Belarusian Diaspora accumulated rich experience in the sphere of maintaining traditions and customs, native language and culture. The associations and

communities in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Great Britain, France, USA, Canada, Australia and other countries play an important role in this process. Such organizations as Association of Belarusian Public Organizations in Lithuania, Federal National and Cultural Autonomy Belarusians of Russia, Ukrainian Council of Belarusians, Association of Belarusians of Kazakhstan, Association of Belarusians of Estonia, Coordination Council of Belarusian Communities of Moldova, Public and Cultural Centers in New York, South River, Cleveland, Toronto, London etc. work rather efficiently in this sphere.

The monuments to M. Bogdanovich in Yaroslavl (Russia), K. Kalinovsky in Shalchininkae (Lithuania) and F. Skorina in Kaliningrad were fixed up with the support of the governmental agencies and organizations of Belarus. The Belarusians abroad put out considerable effort to attract attention of the international community to the problem of consequences of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

The governmental agencies of the Republic of Belarus pay much attention to maintaining contacts with foreign countrymen. The Committee on Religions and Nationalities of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus is in charge of cooperation with foreign countrymen. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus prioritizes the support of the Belarusians in the CIS, Baltic States and Poland.

In 2003, the Regional Executive Committees and Municipal Executive Committees were tasked to establish relations with foreign countrymen in the economic and cultural spheres. The Belarusian Society of Cultural Relations with Countrymen Abroad (Radzima Society) and International Association of Belorusists maintain close contacts with Belarusians abroad.

Given the presence of large communities of Belarusians and natives of Belarus abroad, protection of their legal rights is embodied in international treaties of relations of the Republic of Belarus with foreign countries, intergovernmental agreements on mutual protection of their citizens with Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, Slovakia and Cuba, agreements on opportunities of mutual employment and social protection of their citizens with Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Moldova, Kazakhstan and Armenia and agreements on mutual guarantee of rights of national minorities with Moldova, Ukraine, Russia and Lithuania.

A serious problem the Belarusians living abroad face remains their heterogeneity, different approaches to the international problems, and foreign and domestic policy of the Republic of Belarus. In this context, the Belarusian governmental agencies take actions to consolidate foreign countrymen on a constructive basis. Currently, the Bill On Countrymen Abroad is being drafted and recently the Draft National Program of Developing Cooperation with Countrymen for 2006–2010 has been agreed upon to be further approved by the Government.

An important goal is to provide foreign countrymen with credible and true information about Belarus and its domestic and foreign policy. The newspaper Golas Radzimy (“Belarus21.by”) for countrymen abroad is published with assistance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Committee on Religions and Nationalities of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus. Since 1 January 2005, the international satellite channel Belarus-TV provided by the National State Television and Radio Company (NSTRC) of the Republic of Belarus for foreign audience, primarily Russian and Belarusian-speaking residents of the FSU willing to operationally obtain comprehensive and credible information about Belarus began broadcasting to the foreign countries. Currently, the Belarus-TV broadcasts through cable networks of 12 countries out of 20 being in the signal propagation zone of the satellite Intelsat 904 (this includes Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Uzbekistan, Australia, Georgia and Armenia). Since 17 February 2005, the pro-grams of the Belarus-TV channel may be televised live and on the NSTRC Internet site. The USA, Israel, Germany, Russia, Canada and Great Britain show great interest in the Belarusian television. The NSTRC structural divisions include Belarus radio station broadcasting in the Belarusian, German

and English languages. Currently, the Belarusian radio broadcasting time is 5 hours of on-air broadcasting and 10 hours of the on-line Internet broadcasting daily.

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Additional information:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus
<http://www.mfa.gov.by>
- Golas Radzimi
<http://belarus21.by>