

ANNUAL REVIEW
of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus
and Activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2013

The international environment in 2013 remained unstable and was characterized by dynamic geopolitical changes influenced by both traditional and new threats and challenges. The ongoing world economic crisis negatively affected a whole range of states and regions, including the main trade partners of Belarus, and limited the opportunities for countries with export-oriented economies.

In these conditions the international activity of the Republic of Belarus was aimed at ensuring security and protection of national interests as well as at promoting favourable conditions for economic development of Belarus and improvement of public welfare. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs accurately followed the fundamental foreign policy guidelines set by the President of the Republic of Belarus and specified legally. Its actions were closely coordinated with branch ministries and concerns. The Ministry rendered maximum assistance to Belarusian companies participating in international trade and paid priority attention to protection of interests of Belarusian nationals abroad.

As a responsible member of the international community, Belarus sought to contribute to the solution of global problems and particular crises through active participation in the activities of the UN, international regional and sub-regional organisations. Its efforts were concerted with ally countries, first of all, Russia.

Despite sophisticated international context, overall results achieved in 2013 favoured the improvement of our country's foreign policy standing and advanced its prestige on the world arena. They also widened the opportunities for promotion and protection of the Belarusian citizens' interests as well as for development of new instruments aimed to assist our exporting enterprises.

In the course of the year Belarus strengthened and further promoted relations with its strategic partner – the Russian Federation. Dedicated efforts were made to improve and increase the efficiency of integration mechanisms of which our country is a member – the Union State, the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the latter working in 2013 under the Belarusian Presidency.

The past year gave start to demarcation of the border between Belarus and Ukraine. Compared with 2012, it also saw the progress in our relations with the Baltic States and Poland.

Emerging signs of advancement in dialogue between Belarus and the European Union and the United States indicate the possibility to channel it in a constructive direction.

Significant results were achieved in expanding the range of partners and allies of Belarus in Asia and Latin America, relations between Belarus and China were brought to the level of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Following the interests of Belarusian businesses, our country expands its diplomatic presence in these regions as well as in Africa.

Belarus improved its export support system, including export logistics and development of commodity distribution network. Giving priority attention to the economic component of cooperation in the framework of the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space, Belarus continued consistent integration to the world economy through resumption of negotiations on WTO-accession and drafting certain agreements on free trade areas.

Following instructions of the Head of State, the visa policy of Belarus is undergoing complex adjustment to simplify or abolish visa regime with some foreign countries. Belarus signed visa-free travel agreements with Turkey and Brazil, declared willingness to negotiate the conclusion of a visa facilitation agreement with the European Union. Similar negotiations are in process with a number of other states.

Intensive top-level and high-level dialogue between Belarus and Russia resulted in principal agreements in various spheres of bilateral cooperation – industry, energy, finance, science and technology as well as military-technical cooperation.

A number of common large-scale industrial projects are being practically implemented. Their main purpose is to ensure production of competitive high-tech products by accumulating the potential of our countries in such key areas as automotive, electronics and chemical industry. The implementation of the joint project on construction of the Belarusian nuclear power plant in cooperation with “Rosatom” has continued.

The Russian Federation remained the main trade partner for Belarus: our turnover amounted to \$39.7 billion in 2013. Russia accounted for 49.5 percent of total Belarusian foreign trade. In its turn, Belarus is among six largest trading partners of Russia.

Traditionally, close coordination of actions on the world arena between the foreign ministries of Belarus and Russia favoured the strengthening of international positions of our countries. The main directions of this interaction for the future have been set in the regular Programme of concerted action in the sphere of foreign policy for 2014-2015 of the Member States of the Treaty establishing the Union State.

The union project of Belarus and Russia continued to serve as the main driver of interstate integration within the CIS. Further development of integration processes was underpinned by two meetings of the Supreme State Council, meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Union State in 2013 as well as by implementation of numerous joint programs and projects.

The Republic of Belarus continued its active participation in **the development of the Eurasian integration project** and extended its cooperation with the Member States of the CU/EEA and the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC). Consistent work was carried out in approximating the positions of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan, negotiating and approving the draft Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union.

In the course of 2013, our countries held 3 meetings of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council at the level of the Heads of State, numerous meetings at the level of Heads of Government, 12 meetings of the Council of the EEC. As a result, more than 140 decisions were adopted on tariff and non-tariff regulation, standardization, technical regulation, industrial and agro-industrial policy, common competition rules, public procurement, cooperation in the fields of transport, energy and information exchange.

Work was also conducted on codification of the legal framework of the CU/EEA, step-by-step dismantling of remaining barriers for free movement of goods, services, capital and labor.

In 2013, the troika approved the roadmap for accession of Armenia to the CU/EEA, continued preparation of the roadmap for accession of Kyrgyzstan to the Customs Union, advanced in negotiations of several free trade agreements.

With the Belarusian interests always at the core, the work in 2013 has resulted in new prerequisites for trade growth between the three founding members of the CU/EEA. It also allowed to advance in ensuring fair competition, adequate level of tariff protection of the common market as well as industrial cooperation development.

In 2013, Belarus successfully presided in **the Commonwealth of Independent States**. The priorities of the Presidency were strengthening neighborly relationship, development of economic, investment and innovation cooperation, promotion of the environmentally friendly “green” technologies, expanded cultural dialogue, strengthening the public image of the CIS.

Together with its partners Belarus organized more than 70 significant economic, environmental, humanitarian and interregional cooperation events. Important decisions were approved to expand cooperation in the CIS framework on the areas of security and combating crime, war veterans’ support, enhancement of cooperation on culture and tourism.

Significant attention was attached to further strengthening and development of the free trade area within the Commonwealth. Several rounds of consultations were held on the draft Treaty on Free Trade in Services within the CIS.

The Belarus Presidency in the Commonwealth was a step forward in changing the perception of CIS as a “club of presidents” towards establishment of a new integration philosophy aimed to ensure economic and social stability in the region.

Belarus also continued active bilateral cooperation with the CIS countries. The passed year saw productive official visits of the President of the Republic of Belarus to **Armenia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan**. Belarus was visited by the Heads of Governments of Kazakhstan and Ukraine; the Prime Minister of Belarus paid a working visit to Turkmenistan and the Foreign Minister – an official visit to Azerbaijan.

Sessions of intergovernmental commissions on trade and economic cooperation were held with Ukraine, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan,

Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova, contributing to intensification and expansion of trade and economic cooperation.

The work with the CIS region (excluding Russia) and Georgia resulted in a positive trade balance of \$3.8 billion by the end of 2013.

To increase exports Belarus actively enhanced industrial cooperation with the CIS countries, especially with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. Joint ventures were set up in these states for assembly of tractors, harvesters, trucks, municipal vehicles, mobile cranes, optical equipment, elevators and etc. BelAZ open cast and mine equipment was also assembled in Kazakhstan.

New projects for joint assembly of MAZ buses and GOMSELMASH harvesters are being elaborated with **Azerbaijan**. A project on assembly of Belarusian horticultural tractors is successfully implemented in **Moldova**, which also became a new location for setting up the production of Belarusian trolleybuses.

The construction of Garlyk ore-dressing and processing enterprise for production of potash manure is the flagship project of economic cooperation with **Turkmenistan**, another important area of this cooperation is education of the Turkmen youth in Belarus.

In 2013, certain progress was registered on the track of normalising and developing relations with the European Union (EU), which objectively is one of the priority foreign economic and political partners for Belarus.

Belarus has considerably intensified contacts with EU institutions and foreign ministries of the EU Member States. The passed year allowed for successful implementation of several technical cooperation projects with the EU, including within cross-border cooperation programmes like “Belarus – Latvia – Lithuania”, “Belarus – Poland – Ukraine” and “The Baltic Sea Region”. Equitable and non-discriminatory participation of Belarus in the Vilnius summit of the “Eastern Partnership” set the stage for further work with the European Union towards bringing our relations to a new level.

Negotiations on readmission and visa facilitation agreements will be an important component of cooperation between Belarus and the EU in 2014. Efforts to find a solution for problem issues in Belarus-EU relations will continue.

Belarus consistently develops pragmatic bilateral cooperation **with European countries** in political, economic and investment spheres. High-level contacts with these countries have intensified.

The first official visit of the President of **Serbia** to Belarus and subsequent active dialogue on joint projects under the aegis of the governments and foreign ministries of the two countries gave an important impetus to the development of Belarusian-Serbian relations.

2013 was marked by intensified relations with our Baltic neighbours – **Lithuania and Latvia**. A high-level political dialogue was revived: the Prime Minister of Belarus visited Lithuania to participate in the Belarusian-Lithuanian Economic Forum. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus met with his Latvian and Lithuanian colleagues.

Despite remaining restrictive factors, cooperation with Lithuania developed in a positive way during its EU presidency in the second half of 2013.

Both countries keep the status of important economic partners of Belarus: besides significant turnover and fruitful investment cooperation, a special part in the bilateral agenda is traditionally assigned to mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of transit.

The reciprocal visits of Foreign Ministers and active engagement of the Heads of Parliaments contributed to the maintaining of high dynamics of relations between Belarus and **Turkey**. The practical outcome of such interaction was the signing of bilateral agreements on visa-free travel and readmission. Belarusian-Turkish cooperation also developed in the fields of construction and investment.

The **Belarusian-Polish interagency contacts** received a new impulse in the areas of trade and cross-border cooperation, tourism and agriculture. The Foreign Ministers of the two countries met at the summit of the “Eastern Partnership” in Vilnius.

The level of political dialogue and the intensity of inter-parliamental contacts between Belarus and **Hungary** were also on the rise.

Cooperation between Belarus and France underwent pragmatic development: France was visited by the Ministers of Economy and Finance of Belarus, as well as a number of other high-ranking representatives of the

Belarusian government agencies. In turn, Belarus was visited by a delegation of French parliamentary officials.

In 2013, eight meetings of intergovernmental commissions on trade and economic cooperation were convened with Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey and the Czech Republic. Inter-ministerial consultations were held with 14 European countries.

2013 saw some positive changes in interaction with the **United States**. Successful implementation of some projects and initiatives suggests the first harbingers of warming in bilateral cooperation.

The first over the recent years visit to Belarus of a high-level delegation of the U.S. Department of State was organized in December 2013. The negotiations revealed common approaches to issues of mutual interest, allowed to identify concrete steps to build confidence in bilateral relations.

The bilateral trade exceeded \$0.5 billion in 2013. Effective was bilateral cooperation in the spheres of healthcare, sport, in humanitarian areas, as well as interaction between Belarusian and the U.S. law-enforcement agencies.

Interaction with Africa and the Middle East was traditionally on a high level. Belarus continued constructive and fruitful dialogues with the United Arab Emirates, Israel, Iraq, the Republic of South Africa, Nigeria. A task-oriented work to expand the geography of high-level contacts provided for intensification of political, economic and trade cooperation with new prospective partners, including Mozambique, Ghana, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Sudan and others. Belarus took steps to strengthen ties with influential regional organizations – the African Union and the League of Arab States.

The Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in Ethiopia, opened in September 2013, became the 5th Belarusian diplomatic mission in Africa. Consequently, the area of responsibility of our embassies covers already twenty-six states of the African continent.

At the same time, a very difficult political and economic situation remained in a number of key states for Belarusian interests in Africa and the Middle East (first of all, in Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Nigeria, Iraq), affecting the development of mutually beneficial relations. In this context one of the most

important objectives of our diplomacy in the region was and still is to protect Belarusian nationals residing in these states.

In view of the consistent trend of gradual shifting of the global center of trade and investment to the rapidly developing **Asian countries**, special importance is attached to development of political dialogue and promotion of trade and economic cooperation between Belarus and countries of the Asia-Pacific, South and Southeast Asia.

2013 was marked by the first in the history of bilateral relations state visits of President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko to Indonesia and Singapore. During the state visit to China the leaders of the two countries signed a joint declaration on comprehensive strategic partnership. The treaties and commercial agreements in various fields signed during these meetings amount to around \$1.9 billion.

The geography of contacts at top and high levels as well as of inter-ministerial cooperation included Bangladesh, Vietnam, India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka. Belarus signed over 50 interstate, intergovernmental and interagency agreements with the countries of this region.

The **Latin American vector** of the Republic of Belarus's foreign policy continued to expand, and so did the geography of interstate cooperation.

During the visit of the President of Venezuela to Belarus the leaders of the two countries agreed to elaborate a medium and long-term roadmap of cooperation on the areas of oil production and petrochemicals, exploration seismology, industry, construction, gasification, agriculture, science and technology, education.

For the first time in the history of bilateral relations the Presidents of Ecuador and Bolivia paid visits to Belarus, giving new impulse to profound cooperation with these countries. Following high-level agreements, several meetings of intergovernmental commissions on trade and economic cooperation took place, major joint projects were scheduled for implementation.

Belarusian-Brazilian connections intensified. The memorandum on political consultations and the agreement on visa-free travel were signed during the visit of the Belarusian high-level delegation to Brazil.

Belarus continued strategic cooperation with Cuba, political and economic cooperation with Nicaragua is dynamically building up.

The Republic of Belarus has traditionally been actively engaged in the activities of **the UN and its specialized organizations and institutions**.

In the last year Belarus continued intensive work to promote the country's major foreign policy initiatives, first of all, on combating trafficking in human beings. In particular, in May for the first time in the history of the UN a high level meeting of the General Assembly took place upon the initiative of Belarus to assess the implementation of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. The resolutions initiated by Belarus have been adopted during the year by **the General Assembly, the ECOSOS, the UNESCO and the UN Commission on Crime Prevention**.

In May a **regional conference on countries with average income level in the context of sustained development** was organized in Minsk and attended by representatives of 26 countries and many UN agencies.

As a result of the visit of the head of UNODC Mr Fedotov to Minsk in May, Belarus's cooperation with **the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** has received a new impetus

In accordance with its international obligations in the sphere of human rights, Belarus successfully defended its **national reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** on implementation of relevant international human rights instruments. Interaction with **the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** was brought to a new stage of development. Belarus held a regional seminar on combating racial discrimination in cooperation with the OHCHR, which was attended by the Belarusian authorities and public associations.

In 2013, the Foreign Ministry published the first report on the most serious cases of human rights violations in Western countries, which received wide public and political response.

The passed year saw fruitful development of cooperation between Belarus and the **IAEA**. The Agency rendered substantial consultative and technical assistance to Belarus in development of nuclear energy infrastructure, enhancement of nuclear and radiation safety, introduction of advanced nuclear technology in medicine. Belarus and the IAEA actively cooperated in the area of nuclear security, including in preparation for the World Ice Hockey Championship in 2014.

Belarus intensified programme cooperation with such organizations and agencies as **UNIDO, FAO, UNECE, UNDP, UNICEF**.

The EBRD strategy for Belarus for 2013-2015 financial years was successfully adopted. The volume of the Bank's operations in the country in 2013 reached a historic maximum of 200 million euro.

The Strategy of partnership between **the World Bank Group** and the Republic of Belarus for 2014-2017 financial years, adopted in June, opens opportunities to receive \$380 million from **the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development** and \$140 million from **the International Finance Corporation** for projects implementation in Belarus.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) remained an important regional forum for participation of the Republic of Belarus in the European processes, for strengthening of national security, promotion of foreign policy initiatives and attraction of international expert aid. Belarus made a number of concrete proposals on reforming the Organization within the "Helsinki Plus 40" process, aimed to adopt it to new challenges and to contribute to establishing of a secure community within the OSCE area.

Constructive cooperation with the OSCE executive structures developed, including through the implementation of projects in Belarus in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Organization, the expert dialogue with the Bureau for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on improvement of electoral legislation and practice, the visit of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to Minsk.

The dialogue between Belarus and the **Council of Europe (CoE)** kept the tendency of certain intensification. The Ratification by Belarus of the Convention of CoE on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) as well as the conclusion of the Agreement on

the Privileges and Immunities of the member of the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) allowed to expand cooperation with the Council of Europe to new areas within our country's practical interest. The CoE renewed the European Diploma of protected areas for the National Park "Belovezhskaya Pushcha". Belarus received observer status in the Council of Europe's Committee of Legal Advisers on Public International Law.

The **Central European Initiative** (CEI) remained a significant tool of sub-regional cooperation for Belarus. Belarusian representatives actively participated in ministerial and inter-parliamentary meetings and other activities of the Organization. A number of practical activities and projects were implemented in Belarus with the support of the CEI.

Belarus actively interacted with its partners in the **Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)** to ensure national security, strengthen defense capability and ability to face new challenges and threats. With our active engagement the CSTO Member States developed and practically implemented the mechanism of foreign policy coordination, which allowed for inclusion of Belarus's priority issues in CSTO joint statements.

Belarus continued to make specific contribution to Anti-Terrorist Operation in Afghanistan by providing to NATO the possibility of rail transit through its territory of non-lethal cargo for the International Security Assistance Force. Pending the World Ice Hockey Championship, Belarus and **NATO** conducted a joint table-top exercise "Emergency liquidation during the international sporting events".

Seeking for active contribution in **maintaining international peace and stability** Belarus joined international efforts to destroy Syrian chemical weapons and, on request by the UN/OPCW joint mission special coordinator, rendered specific financial assistance to Syria.

A range of new initiatives has been implemented in the sphere of **nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation**. On January 15-17, 2013 in Minsk a seminar on the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) was held under the auspices of the CIS Executive Committee, the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs, the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre.

To mark the 20th Anniversary of Belarus's signing Lisbon Protocol to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, on October 10, 2013 in New York during

68th Session of the UN General Assembly Belarus organized a round table “Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine: 20 years without nuclear weapons. Lessons and the future on non-proliferation”.

Cooperation with the **Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons** (OPCW) has gained new impetus. The first international OPCW Training Course “Rescue Operations in Chemically Contaminated Areas” was held in Belarus. Belarus was also elected to OPCW Executive Council for 2014-2016.

Our active contribution to **international anti-terrorism efforts** was acknowledged by the visit to Belarus of the delegation of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate in October 2013.

Belarus continued to actively engage in various forums on **international information security**. A representative of Belarusian Foreign Ministry is a member of the UN Group of Governmental Experts on international information security (GGE). The latest GGE report was approved by the UN resolution. Agreements on cooperation on international information security were concluded with Russia (bilateral agreement) and within the CIS area.

By now, Belarus has a complete tool set **to support its export**. The best practices of the majority of export-oriented countries as well as recommendations of Belarusian enterprises and Embassies were taken into account and considered. Such mechanisms as export crediting, export risks insurance, international lease, tax incentives, support of trade shows and small business enterprises, informational and organizational support have been implemented in practice.

Coordination of development of the logistics infrastructure of Belarusian export abroad has become a new area in MFA activities in 2013.

MFA coordinates the implementation of National Export Development Program for 2011-2015, analyses and monitors foreign trade and investment inflows from the countries with Belarusian diplomatic missions (these countries account for 95 percent of Belarusian export).

New diplomatic missions of the Republic of Belarus are aimed to facilitate diversified foreign trade and to explore new markets. In 2013, the Embassy of Belarus was opened in Ethiopia. In 2014, Belarus plans to open its

Embassies in Australia, Qatar, Mongolia, Pakistan and Ecuador. Opening of diplomatic missions in Iraq and Angola is under consideration.

In 2013, Belarusian goods were exported to seven new countries. In total, Belarus had 196 foreign trade partners in 2013.

As of July 1, 2013 MFA coordinates the commodity distribution network of over 300 Belarusian enterprises abroad, including assembly lines, trading houses, service centers and other companies with Belarusian ownership.

MFA carries out targeted work with Belarusian exporters to enhance quality and to increase the level of after-sales services, implements joint plans to increase export sales.

Special attention in interaction within “troika” is given to its economic component, including implementation of protection mechanisms for the markets of the Customs Union and Common Economic Space, protection of exporters from imposition by foreign countries the measures to limit Belarusian produce, preparation of free trade zones agreements. The Customs Union and the Common Economic Space Member States are actively negotiating free trade agreements with the European Free Trade Association, Vietnam. Similar agreements with New Zealand, Israel and India are being considered.

Following the prolonged waiting period, in 2013 Belarus resumed negotiations on WTO-accession – held one round of multilateral consultations with all major WTO Member States and two rounds of bilateral talks with 9 WTO Members States on the market access. Belarus was also engaged in an active dialogue with its partners in Eurasian integration to coordinate approaches towards WTO-accession.

In 2013, 175 international agreements and other international legal documents (115 bilateral and 60 multilateral) were prepared and concluded. As a result, the present day bilateral legal and legislative basis of the Republic of Belarus consists of 2160 international agreements concluded with 101 countries. Multilateral legal and legislative basis consists of 1630 international agreements concluded with international organizations and integration structures in various areas of cooperation. The priority in development of legal and legislative basis is given to bilateral trade agreements.

In 2013, Belarus established diplomatic relations with Djibouti and South Sudan. So far, our country has established diplomatic relations with 173 countries of the world, i.e. 90 percent of the UN membership.

Special attention in the activity of MFA and diplomatic missions was traditionally paid to **rendering consular assistance to Belarusian citizens** in extreme situations abroad and to protection of their legal rights and interests overseas.

The most challenging situations that required special attention of consular officials and further introduction of complex measures happened in Ukraine, Syria, Pakistan, Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Abkhazia, Mexico, Yemen. In the countries with no Belarusian diplomatic missions Belarusian nationals were assisted by Russian consular services.

Great attention was given to further development of bilateral legal and legislative basis in the area of travel facilitation. Intergovernmental travel visa waiver agreements were signed with Singapore, UAE, Laos, Sri-Lanka, Mongolia, Bolivia, Brazil, Turkey. The agreements with Myanmar and Ecuador on the mutual waiver of visa requirements for holders of diplomatic and official passports became effective. Conclusion of similar treaties with other countries is being considered.

MFA held consultations on consular issues with the foreign ministries of Iran, Russia, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Georgia. MFA officials took part at the 20th session of the Advisory Council of Heads of Consular Services of the Foreign Ministries of the CIS member states.

The issuance of visas was one of the most high-profile aspects of the work of consular service: 426 140 of foreign nationals and non-citizens were granted Belarusian visas in 2013.