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COOPERATION OF UKRAINE AND THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS: MODERN STAGE

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Belarus and Ukraine were established on December 27, 1991. The Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in Ukraine has been operating since October 1993. In 2011 the Consulate General of the Republic of Belarus was open in Odessa.

The Republic of Belarus and Ukraine are inseparably linked not only by the centuries-long fraternal relations, but also by the gathering momentum of mutually beneficial cooperation. We are the neighbors. And that says it all. The length of our common border exceeds thousand kilometers. Civilized neighbors inherently should live in peace and harmony. Indeed, Belarus and Ukraine have not only territorial but also mental proximity. We are tied by the centuries of joint history, mutual recognition of values which brought up more than one generation of our citizens and Slavic spirituality. Our fathers and grandfathers have been fighting together for the victory in the Great Patriotic War, overcoming post-war devastation, restoring peaceful life. Many of them have built strong family ties.

Modern relations between Belarus and Ukraine are marked by an active political dialogue against the growing swing of trade and economic ties. In the development of political dialogue the Belarusian party convincingly demonstrates respect for Ukraine's sovereign right to select its own political and socio-economic development pattern. Belarusian-Ukrainian relations are built on the principles of neighborliness, mutual interests and mutually beneficial partnership.

An open dialogue of equal partners is conducted at all levels: between the Presidents, governments, ministries and governmental agencies. The framework of Intergovernmental Belarusian-Ukrainian joint commission on trade and economic cooperation gives fruitful



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Interior of the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus

practical results. They include production cooperation, joint manufacturing, transportation and logistics, science-based projects in the economy.

Interparliamentary cooperation is being successfully implemented — both at the level of speakers and through interparliamentary commission on cooperation between the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

Belarus and Ukraine work jointly at the United Nations towards keeping the Chernobyl issue on the UN agenda. Partnership between Minsk and Kyiv is of mutually beneficial nature on issues pertaining to the promotion to the UN elective bodies.

Over 160 bilateral international agreements and the other international legal instruments have been concluded between our countries. The Agreement on friendship, good-neighborliness and cooperation is the fundamental document that provides ample opportunities for the development of relations on a state-to-state level. The Agreement on visa-free travel for citizens dated June 12, 2009 establishes fairly free movement regime across the state border for Belarusian and Ukrainian people. What matters is that improvement of bilateral legal framework in various areas is going on.

Ukraine is one of the Belarus' strategic trade partners. Our economies are closely tied; for example, practically all Belarusian heavy industry works using the Ukrainian metals. Bilateral trade and economic cooperation is featured by the steady tendency to grow mutual trade. Over the last decade its volumes have increased almost tenfold.

Ukraine ranks the third in terms of turnover and export volumes among the countries – our trading partners. Belarus, in its turn, holds the fourth place among the major trading partners of Ukraine – after Russia, Germany and China.

Last year mutual trade turnover grew by 40 percent and reached a record high, breaking the line of \$6.0 billion USD. The current year's tendencies show that we have not stopped at the achieved – by the results of three quarters the turnover amounted to \$5.9 billion USD.

It is important to note that trade and economic interaction between our two countries has been steadily moving from the stage of simple commodity exchange to the level of cooperative collaboration.

The number of enterprises to supply commodities within the framework of the intergovernmental agreement on production and scientific-technical cooperation has been increased in both countries.

Considerable positive experience to create joint assembly plants in machine-building was gained, this being direct financial, intellectual and technological investments into our economies.

Joint assembly plants created in Belarus and Ukraine possess huge potential to increase the volumes of product and component mutual deliveries.

As of today, 9 joint assembly plants are under operation, including two to assemble MTZ tractors; one – to assemble grain harvesters at «Gomselmash» OJSC; another – to assemble machinery at «Lidagroprommash» OJSC; and also to assemble elevators; trolley buses; trucks at «MAZ» OJSC.

In December 2011 a joint venture was formed in our country to produce passenger cars with participation of Ukrainian «Kriukiv Carriage Works» PJSC – «Gomel Carriage Works» CJSC. The enterprise plans to expand its product range.

In December 2011 «Motor Sich» PJSC (Zaporizhyya), one of the world's major aircraft engine manufacturer, acquired 60 percent of shares of «Orshansky Aircraft Repair Plant» OJSC. Within four years they plan to invest \$ 12 million USD into Belarusian enterprise. The signed investment agreement stipulates future construction of multimodal transport and logistics center based on this enterprise to be located at the intersection of the 2-nd and the 9-th international transport corridors.

A joint venture was also created based on «Svetlogorsk welding electrode plant» LLC with participation of «PlazmaTec» Ukrainian group of companies, which plans to reach 80 percent of required in Belarus coverage in welding electrodes. To expand the cooperation directions, the state-owned stake of «Rogachevgazstroy» was acquired.

Deliveries of sophisticated technical engineering products to Ukraine are maintained under leasing agreements (options to supply agricultural, municipal, road-construction machinery from Belarusian producers are considered). The draft intergovernmental agreement to create favorable legal, economic and organizational conditions for the expansion of leasing activities is prepared for signing.

These examples show that our countries have prospects for further cooperation expansion in various directions.

For instance, transportation and logistics component occupies an important place in our trade and economic cooperation.

Advantageous geographical location of Ukraine and Belarus should be used to create a full functional international transport corridor between the Baltic and the Black Seas.

During the working visit of the President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich, to Belarus in 2010, the heads of States agreed upon comprehensive development of the transport corridor running through the territories of both states and consisting of several modules, including road, railway and inland water trunks.

Bilateral commissions work in all the above-mentioned areas, their results are discussed at the meetings of Intergovernmental Belarusian-Ukrainian joint commission on trade and economic cooperation.

In this context, joint action plans were signed in December 2011 to implement Belarusian-Ukrainian infrastructure projects on highway and railway transport included into IX-B Klaipeda –Minsk–Kyiv transport corridor.

In the framework of the Agreement to develop cargo transportation from the Baltic to the Black Sea, signed by the heads of transport ministries of Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania, railway departments of both countries make considerable efforts to arrange container transportation by the «Viking» train (Illichivsk – Minsk – Drauhyste). European Intermodal Association has repeatedly recognized the «Viking» train as the best European cargo transportation project. Other Black Sea countries have already acceded to this agreement as well.

Over the last years Belarusian-Ukrainian cooperation in scientific and technical fields, including pharmaceutical and aerospace industries, intensified notably.

In June 2009 a framework intergovernmental agreement on cooperation to explore and use the outer space for peaceful purposes was signed in Kiev. The agreement creates legal framework to conclude bilateral instruments and reach additional arrangements in the space field.

In order to implement the Agreement, directions for prospective cooperation in the space sector between Belarusian and Ukrainian enterprises and organizations were approved and appropriate action plan was signed, eight agreements between the main executors of Belarusian and Ukrainian side were concluded.

In 2010 the Intergovernmental Belarusian-Ukrainian joint commission on trade and economic cooperation created the Working Group on cooperation in health protection.

The Working Group contributed to sign the agreements between Belarusian and Ukrainian pharmaceutical associations on cooperation and joint activity in the production field for pharmaceutical substances.

The option is considered to establish joint production in the Republic of Belarus of new pharmaceuticals based on original substances, generics and immunobiological medications manufactured in Ukraine.

Partner contacts are implemented with participation of «Arterium» corporation, «Borschagivsky Pharmaceutical Plant» CJSC R&D center, «Darnitsya Pharmaceutical company» CJS, «Farmeks Group» LLC, «Pharma Life» LLC, «Biopharma» PJSC, «Pharmstandard-Biolik» PJSC and other enterprises.

Relations between Belarus and Ukraine in the field of mutual supply of agricultural products have long-standing historical roots.

At present Belarusian-Ukrainian cooperation in agribusiness is coordinated by the bilateral working group to increase mutual presence of agricultural, food and other products on the markets of Ukraine and Belarus. The working group is established by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food of Ukraine.

Belarus is a great importer of agricultural sector products from Ukraine. Our country traditionally purchases considerable amounts of crops, corn and sunflower oil from Ukraine. Food products deliveries account for over 20 percent in the total import structure of Belarus from Ukraine and constitute \$ 413.6 million USD. Only sunflower oil is purchased for \$ 93 million USD.

Belarusian products, primarily meat and dairy, are represented on the Ukrainian market in smaller scales, if compared with deliv-

eries from Ukraine. In 2011 the Republic of Belarus supplied agricultural and food products to Ukraine worth \$ 95.6 million USD.

Development and deepening of regional ties continues. Over forty cities concluded partnership agreements. Cooperation of near-border regions, in particular, Gomel and Zhytomyr, Brest and Volyn, is developing most actively. Issues of economic and humanitarian cooperation between the near-border regions are resolved at various levels, up to the government.

Last year cooperation agreements were signed between Dobrushsky rayon (Gomel region) and Borzna rayon (Chernihiv region), Rechitsk (Gomel region) and Tsuryupynsk (Kherson region) rayons, Hoyniki (Gomel region) and Ovruch (Zhytomyr region) rayons, Hoyniki (Gomel region) and Dobropil (Donetsk region) rayon, Novobilytsky district of Gomel city and Darnytsya district of Kyiv; Mogilev and Kherson regions in 2012.

Currently, commodity exchange is carried out with all regions of Ukraine and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Kyiv and Sevastopol cities as separate administrative units. To fill in the Agreement on visiting fair trade in nationally manufactured commodities in the border regions of Ukraine and Belarus with specific content, legal mechanisms are being developed to ensure implementation of the provisions of document.

Humanitarian area is an integral part of our cooperation and solidarity. Cultural exchange between the Republic of Belarus and Ukraine is at the high pitch. The Agreement between the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Government of the Republic of Belarus on cooperation in the field of cultural heritage protection and the cooperation Program between the Ministries of Culture of Ukraine and the Republic of Belarus for 2010–2013 are the legal framework for comprehensive interaction in this direction. In particular, the Program provides for mutual participation of ensembles and performers in musical contests and festivals, comprehensive development of contacts between theaters, museums, libraries, higher and secondary educational institutions in our countries.

In recent years the Days of Culture of the Republic of Belarus in Ukraine were held both in Kyiv and Lviv, while the Days of Ukrainian Culture in Belarus were held in Minsk and Gomel.

Arrangements made during the visit of A.G. Lukashenko, President of the Republic of Belarus to Ukraine (2010), are put into practice. Last fall a monument to Vladimir Korotkevich, the famous Belarusian writer whose young years were connected with Kyiv, was erected in the Ukrainian capital city near the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus. The opening ceremony was attended by the ministers of culture of both countries, representatives of Belarusian and Ukrainian intellectuals and ordinary public.

In 2012 Belarus celebrates a number of significant dates: 130 years since the birth of the great classics Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas, 100 years since the birth of Maksim Tank, 125 years since the birth of Marc Chagall, 1150 anniversary since the first reference of Polotsk. The events coincided with these dates take place not only in Belarus, but also in Ukraine. Presentations, exhibitions, meetings with creative people are held; documentaries about our famous countrymen are shown.

International Festival of Arts «Slaviansky Bazaar in Vitebsk» remains really a popular joint project. The Festival events are traditionally attended by famous masters of the arts and artistic collectives of Ukraine, whose concerts always attract intense interest among the audience.

In the nearest future we will jointly recall the other historical events and memorable dates: 1025 anniversary since Kievan Rus Christianization in 2013 and Millennium since the death of Prince Vladimir in 2015.

We do not forget the ethnic Belarusians living on the territory of Ukraine and number of which reaches almost 275,000 persons. Our objective is to provide an opportunity for the fellow countrymen to preserve national traditions, culture and language. To meet these needs a set of measures is implemented in the Republic of Belarus. In particular, a weekly newspaper «Golas Radzimy» is published highlighting the activity of Belarusian diaspora abroad; Belarusian TV channel «Belarus-TV» and «Belarus» radio station broadcast for the CIS states and overseas countries.

The Center of Belarusian language and culture, created in 2009 at the Institute of Philology of Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University, is successfully functioning. Since September 2010 the

КНУ Institute of Philology admits students with specialization in «Belarusian language and literature, Ukrainian language and literature, English language».

Creative teams of Belarusian communities take part in cultural activities both in Belarus and Ukraine, celebrate national holidays, thus preserve Belarusian cultural traditions.

Thus, there is every reason to speak of not just the contacts between the two countries in various fields but of the shaped system of long-term partnership. Its nature is summed up by the Head of our State Alexander G. Lukashenko after one of the meetings with Viktor Yanukovich, President of Ukraine: «Relations between Ukraine and Belarus are distinguished by the fact that the parties are capable to negotiate. If the problems arise we sit down at the table and discuss them. We try to resolve them, make arrangements; eventually, a normal dialogue is carried on».