

## **EU-Belarus Relations**

### **Political and Legal Foundations**

#### **EU's message to the people of Belarus**

On 21 November 2006, the European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner launched a document setting out [What the EU could bring to Belarus](#), were Belarus to engage in democratisation and respect for human rights and rule of law. It contains concrete examples of how the people of Belarus could gain from a rapprochement between the EU and Belarus within the framework of the [European Neighbourhood Policy \(ENP\)](#). Due to the current political conditions, it has so far not been possible for the EU to offer to Belarus the full advantages of the ENP, which are already enjoyed by other countries in the region including Ukraine and Moldova.

#### **The European Neighbourhood Policy and Belarus**

The Commission launched the ENP in its [Communication on Wider Europe of March 2003](#) and complemented it with a Communication in July 2003 which introduced the concept of Neighbourhood Programmes. The ENP lays the ground for closer cooperation with the neighbouring countries of the enlarged Union and offers an opportunity to Belarus for improving relations with the EU. Following endorsement of these concepts by Council conclusions in March and October 2003 respectively, the Commission further elaborated the policy initiative in a Strategy Paper in May 2004. The Council and European Council welcomed and endorsed the Commission's Strategy Paper in June 2004.

Initially, Belarus welcomed the European Neighbourhood Policy concept and suggested specific areas for cooperation without, however, responding to the basic democratic requirements. Unfortunately, anti-democratic developments and human rights violations have made it impossible for EU-Belarus relations to develop further within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The EU stands ready to develop relations with Belarus further if Belarus demonstrates its commitment to democracy, respect for rule of law, good governance and the respect for human rights, including minority rights.

### **EU-Belarus Relations 2006-2007**

The [OSCE/ODIHR report of 7th June 2006](#) concluded that the Presidential elections held in March 2006 failed to meet OSCE standards for democratic elections. It reported on the arbitrary use of state power and widespread detentions a disregard for the basic rights of freedom of assembly, association and expression as well as problems with early voting, counting and tabulation processes. Registered OSCE and EU observers, including members of the parliament, were refused admission. The European Union therefore considered the election to be fundamentally flawed. Violent suppression of protests and the detention of peaceful protesters were also condemned by Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner in the aftermath of the elections.

In view of these events, on 10th-11th April 2006 the Council decided to adopt restrictive measures against President Lukashenko, the Belarusian leadership and officials personally responsible for the violations of international electoral standards, in particular those of the OSCE, and international human rights law, as well as for the crackdown on civil society and democratic opposition. These measures took the form of a visa ban and an asset freeze. These sanctions were adopted in addition to those taken by the Council on 24 September 2004 against four Belarusian officials identified as key actors in the disappearances of four Belarusian personalities; and those taken on 13 December 2004 against two officials responsible for the October 2004 fraudulent elections and referendum as well as severe human rights violations in the repression of peaceful demonstrators.

In March 2007, the list of sanctions was rolled-over until April 2008.

According to the Council Common Position, the list of individuals to be affected by the visa ban should be reviewed in light of the speedy release and rehabilitation of all political detainees, and in the light of reforms made to the Electoral Code to bring it in line with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections as recommended by the OSCE/ODIHR, the conduct of future elections, and concrete actions by the authorities to respect democratic values, the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression and of the media, and the freedom of assembly and political association.

At the same time, following the election, the EU reiterated its commitment to engage with Belarusian society by further strengthening its support for civil society and democratisation; it also committed to intensify and facilitate people-to-people contacts and enhance access to independent sources of information.

The EU recalled that it remained open to developing bilateral relations with Belarus, including in the context of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the European Neighbourhood Policy, provided the Belarusian authorities take significant steps towards respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic values and initiate democratic reforms. The EU's offer to Belarus to enter a full partnership as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy was further developed in the document "What the EU could bring to Belarus" that Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner issued on 21 November 2006.

**[EU-Belarus Relations 1991-1999](#)**

**[EU-Belarus Relations 2000-2002](#)**

**[EU-Belarus Relations 2003-2005](#)**

[http://ec.europa.eu/world/where/belarus/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/world/where/belarus/index_en.htm)