

Strategy Paper/Multiannual Indicative Programme

Belarus 2014-2017

SUMMARY

In 1995, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Belarus was signed, but ratification by EU Member States is suspended since 1997. The EU restrictive measures against Belarus adopted in April 2006 were suspended in 2008, but reactivated in 2011 due to violations of electoral standards in the 19 December 2010 Presidential elections and the subsequent crackdown on civil society and the political opposition. In October 2013, the Council extended the EU restrictive measures until 31 October 2014. The annual review updated the list of those targeted with a travel ban and asset freeze within the EU.

In March 2012, the European Dialogue on Modernisation (DoM) with Belarusian society was launched.

In June 2011, the Commission offered Belarus to start negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements to the benefit of the population at large. In November 2013, at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, Belarus agreed to enter into such negotiations, which started in early 2014.

The EU's long term strategic goal is that Belarus should subscribe to core European Neighbourhood principles, in the same way as other Eastern Partnership countries. However, this is still very far from reality, and currently the development of bilateral relations between the EU and Belarus under the Eastern Partnership remains conditional on progress towards respect by Belarus for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Belarus' participation in the Eastern Partnership Initiative is limited to the multilateral track.

Following comprehensive consultations with key line Ministries, civil society organisations, multilateral and bilateral donors, international financial institutions and international organisations, a consensus has been reached regarding three priority sectors of intervention to be financed through the national envelope:

- **Social inclusion (indicative 30%)**

Belarus is facing several social and economic challenges related to public health and social inclusion (disabled, the elderly, women, minorities, access to education and jobs, etc.). EU intervention in these fields are in line with the 'Agenda for Change', and has the potential to ensure wide public outreach of EU activities (immediate target groups plus their families and communities), policy innovations and dialogue with local and regional authorities, whereby civil society can play a more prominent role in terms of expertise and service delivery.

- **Environment (indicative 25%)**

Environment remains at the core of sustainable development both in EU and Belarus policy. The *National Strategy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of Belarus until 2020*, includes numerous environmental areas to work on: improvement of legislation and its harmonisation with European standards; resource-saving techniques and technologies; enhancing the environmental capacity of forest, land and water resources; reducing emissions of pollutants; treatment and disposal of industrial and consumer waste, etc. raising. For all intents and purposes, EU support can assist Belarus to achieve these goals, including by building up civil society capacity.

- **Local and Regional Economic Development (indicative 25%)**

The current Belarus national *Programme of Socio-Economic Development for 2011-2015* outlines an ambitious modernisation agenda, including sustainable regional development; development of human capital; structural reform of the economy; intense support to SMEs and the private sector; creation of a conducive environment for business and competitiveness, improved economic governance and integration into the world economy. The ultimate ambition is to achieve living standards comparable to the average level of those in the EU, but at present Belarus lacks the resources to achieve this goal. This presents the EU with a window of opportunity to contribute to sustainable social and economic development, particularly working at the local level and with civil society.

- **Complementary support to civil society (indicative 10%)**

The most effective manner to support the development of civil society is through the targeted focal sectors with significant grant components to foster confidence building in relations with State authorities. Each of the 3 priority sectors of intervention mentioned above includes considerable support to civil society (about one third).

However, a separate allocation is planned to cover additional measures in support of the civil society, and, more in particular to complement the direct assistance in support of civil society provided by other thematic instruments; to provide targeted support to students not covered by the EU educational programmes; to promote people to people contacts; to promote good democratic practices.

- **Complementary support to capacity building (indicative 10%)**

In addition to sector-related assistance, this complementary support will provide specific assistance for the implementation of priority commitments deriving from future possible EU

agreements and the dialogue on mobility that are not already covered under the three sectors of concentration.

<i>Indicative allocation 2014-2020</i>	€129,000,000 – €158,000,000
<i>Indicative allocation for the 1st period (2014-2017)</i>	€71,000,000 – €89,000,000
<i>Breakdown for the 1st period</i>	
<i>Social inclusion</i>	30 %
<i>Environment</i>	25 %
<i>Local and Regional Economic Development</i>	25 %
<i>Complementary Support to Civil Society</i>	10 %
<i>Complementary support for capacity development</i>	10%