

# FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT EU-BELARUS RELATIONS

#easternpartnership



Over the past three years, there has been progress in EU-Belarus relations. Belarus has been participating actively in the multilateral formats of the Eastern Partnership. The bilateral relationship will be strengthened through the EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities, which are currently being negotiated. This will set the strategic framework for cooperation in the coming years. Tangible steps taken by Belarus to respect universal freedoms, the rule of law, and human rights, including the freedoms of speech, expression and of media, and labour rights, will remain fundamental criteria for shaping the EU's policy towards Belarus. The EU also supports Belarus' World Trade Organisation accession process as this will contribute to the creation of a more predictable and stable business environment in the country. Negotiations on a Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreement with Belarus were recently finalised.

## STRONGER ECONOMY

Since the EU lifted most of the restrictive measures against Belarus in February 2016, the EU has supported a number of key measures to help further develop the country's economy:

- ✓ Cooperation with international financial institutions such as the **European Investment Bank (EIB)** and the **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)**; funding for a number of large scale infrastructure projects, notably within the extended TEN-T and in waste management, has been approved.
- ✓ Assistance in the framework of the **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** accession process; the removal of textile quotas.
- ✓ Bilateral dialogues on **economic and financial issues**, trade as well as customs cooperation are in place.
- ✓ In Belarus, the EU has assisted **4,500 companies** with funding, training, and export support to new markets through the **EU4Business initiative: 4,000 new jobs were created** helping small and medium sized enterprises grow.
- ✓ The **first Twinning project** between the National Bank of Belarus, the German Bundesbank and the Central Banks of Poland and Lithuania is successfully ongoing.

## STRONGER CONNECTIVITY

- ✓ After joining the EBRD-managed trust fund, the **Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership**, in 2017, Belarus has access to **€10 million** for key projects in energy efficiency and environmental protection. The first Puhovichi Solid Waste project has helped to leverage total investments of €7 million. A new project supporting energy efficiency in residential buildings is currently under preparation.
- ✓ EU support has helped to improve energy efficiency in educational facilities for the benefit of **2,000 school and pre-school children**, and EU support to modernisation has improved the living conditions of **10,000 Belarusian citizens** and cut the electricity bills of **10 municipalities**.
- ✓ Under the **TEN-T indicative investment plan**, a total of 890 km of road and 200 km of rail improvements will bring better connectivity, improved road safety and use of intelligent transport systems.
- ✓ The **Strengthening Air Quality and Environmental Management** programme backs Belarus' efforts to modernise air quality monitoring and contributes to improved air quality in Belarus.
- ✓ Bilateral dialogue on **environment and climate action** takes place on an annual basis.

## STRONGER GOVERNANCE

- ✓ The **EU-Belarus Coordination Group** meets twice a year at the level of senior officials. This policy dialogue forum steers cooperation between the EU and Belarus and oversees further development of relations.
- ✓ The **annual EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue** provides a forum for discussion on the human rights situation in Belarus and joint steps to be taken in this area. The EU remains committed to cooperate with Belarus to enhance democratic governance and develop institutions responsive to citizens' needs.
- ✓ A **Twinning project** to support the National Cadastral Agency has started with Spain and the Netherlands, a Twinning project with the Ministry of Emergency Situations is about to start with Austria and Finland, and three Twinning projects with the State Border Committee, the Customs Committee and the Statistical Committee are to be launched.
- ✓ Taking into account the remaining important challenges in this area, the EU regularly raises issues related to **freedom of assembly and association, freedom of speech and media** as well as fundamental labour rights, with the Belarusian authorities at all levels. The European Union raises its strong opposition to capital punishment, which is still in use in Belarus, and calls for a moratorium on the death penalty.
- ✓ In October 2016, Belarus adopted the **National Human Rights Action Plan**, which underpins the process of domestic reforms and legislative amendments in respect of human rights and fundamental values. The EU is supporting its implementation, including for continued dialogue between the Government and civil society.

## STRONGER SOCIETY

- ✓ After the EU-Belarus negotiations on a **Mobility Partnership** were concluded in 2016, the cooperation was successfully launched. The first high-level meeting took place in November 2017. Several cooperation projects were launched under the Mobility Partnership framework in 2018 in the area of border and migration management to increase Belarus' capacity in the view of the future Readmission Agreement with the EU. Negotiations on **Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements** were recently finalised.
- ✓ Under **Erasmus+**, over **3,000 students and academic staff exchanges** have taken place between Belarus and the EU since 2009.
- ✓ Over **3,400 young people and youth workers** from Belarus have been involved in joint exchanges, training and volunteering projects.
- ✓ Over **3,200 Belarusians** have benefitted from short-term professional exchanges in the EU in the areas of culture, education, health, science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship, gaining skills, knowledge and establishing professional contacts with peers in EU Member States.

## IN FIGURES

**1/3**

The EU is Belarus' 2nd trading partner with a share of almost a third of the country's overall trade.

In 2018, trade between the EU and Belarus increased by

**5%**

compared to the previous year. Since 2009, trade flows between the EU and Belarus have increased by

**18,5%**

From 2014-2018, the EU's assistance to Belarus under the European Neighbourhood Instrument amounted to

**€110 million**

## NUCLEAR SAFETY

The respect of the highest nuclear safety standards is a key priority for the EU, especially since a nuclear power plant is being constructed so close to the EU borders (in Astraviec, Belarus). It is important for the European Union that nuclear safety is ensured beyond its own borders and Belarus should continue to cooperate constructively with the relevant international authorities.

## CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

The number of local authorities joining the Covenant of Mayors initiative has doubled in the past years, reaching 46 signatories. This demonstrates a high interest, motivation and capability for local level action in Belarus to cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and save energy.