

Non-Paper

“What the European Union could bring to Belarus”

The European Union has a special relationship with its closest neighbours around its eastern and southern borders. This is called the European Neighbourhood Policy. Through this policy, the EU works to support the political, economic and social reform processes of its neighbours, and to draw them closer to the EU, notably through gradual economic integration. This will allow for the further extension of a zone of prosperity, stability and security, thus sharing with the people of Belarus the benefits the EU (which includes three of Belarus’ neighbours -Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) has built over the last 50 years.

The EU is already working with Belarus’ neighbours and partners and would of course like to build such a relationship with Belarus. This would contribute to reinforcing Belarusian links with countries that are part of the European Neighbourhood Policy already, such as Ukraine and Moldova. At the same time, this would fully respect traditional Belarusian relationships with our other common neighbour, Russia, which is also a strategic partner for the EU.

What the EU offers to Belarus

When Belarus becomes a full participant in our neighbourhood policy¹, and thus a full partner of the EU, the EU would be able to **help to improve quality of life of the Belarusian people**.

To this end, the EU and Belarus would work together to achieve the following improvements that would directly benefit the people of Belarus:

- easier travel by Belarusian citizens to EU countries;
- increased cross-border cooperation, allowing greater cooperation on economic development, environmental protection and border management;
- boosting the Belarusian economy, supporting the development of small and medium enterprises and preparing Belarusian enterprises for further opportunities in the European market. This would create more jobs and provide better perspectives also for the younger generations; this could be achieved through economic reforms that would make Belarus more attractive for foreign investors;
- improve the provision of healthcare and education and of support for the vulnerable in society;
- making the Belarusian public administration and local government more efficient in order to provide the people of Belarus with better services;

¹ In order to fully benefit from the European Neighbourhood Policy, a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Belarus and the EU would need to be ratified. Such an Agreement was in fact signed in 1996 but its ratification was frozen due to the lack of respect for democracy and human rights in Belarus.

- reform of the legal and judicial system to ensure equal rights to all. This requires independent judges who work in a fair and independent manner to protect the rights of all citizens and the development of civil society;
- greater economic opportunities for Belarus and improved living conditions for its citizens through the development and modernisation of transport and energy networks. This would improve Belarus' road and rail links to its neighbours as part of a European-wide network, thus facilitating travel and the transport of goods;
- improve the quality of the environment: water quality, waste treatment, continued support to deal with the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster;
- participation in Europe-wide cooperation on environment, health, food safety standards, working conditions, aviation safety, judicial cooperation etc. through participation in European programmes and agencies.

We would also be able to develop **more and better contacts** between the EU and Belarus:

- We would simplify contacts across the border and make border-crossing easier for local people through cooperation with Belarus' neighbours;
- Belarusian cities and communities could work together with cities and communities in the EU , exchanging information and experiences on how to better serve the population;
- We would offer Belarusian students more scholarships to study in EU universities. We would encourage regular and long-term exchanges and lasting relationships between universities in Belarus and in the EU at all levels, including both administrative and academic;
- We could have a close dialogue and cooperation with Belarus' democratically-elected leaders and civil servants and experts on a wide range of issues, domestic or international, of importance to us all. Belarusian views would be heard more widely on the international stage;
- We could more actively involve representatives of Belarus – at national, regional or local level – as well as Belarusian officials, academics, scientists etc., in working together to tackle issues of common interest, sharing and exchanging our expertise and know-how on e.g. economy and trade, modern governance, the rule of law, information, education, tourism, culture, research, energy, health, social issues, environment, transport and communication etc.

We would have **deeper economic and trade relations** and **more business opportunities**:

- Greater access for Belarusian products, provided they meet our standards, to the EU market of 480 million consumers, which would help to increase Belarus' trade and subsequently enhance the country's further economic development;
- Looking in particular at the Belarusian textile sector, better possibilities for textile products from Belarus to enter the European market;
- When Belarus joins the World Trade Organisation, this should increase market opportunities for Belarusian products across the world, including in the EU.

In order to support Belarus' economic and social development programmes, we would **significantly increase European financial assistance**, and we would offer our valuable experience in reforms.

Belarus has, up to now, received far less assistance than its neighbours. However, this situation would change and Belarus would receive assistance comparable to that of its neighbours, if the Belarusian government takes significant steps towards democratisation.

What can the Belarusian government do?

Unfortunately, at this stage, the policies pursued by President Lukashenko's authoritarian regime prevent us from offering Belarus full participation in our neighbourhood policy. The EU cannot offer to deepen its relations with a regime which denies its citizens their fundamental democratic rights. The people of Belarus are the first victims of the isolation imposed by its authorities and will be the first to reap the benefits on offer to a democratic Belarus

The EU wishes to share with its neighbours the prosperity, stability and security which its own citizens enjoy. This requires political, economic and administrative reforms from our partner countries. To support our neighbours in these efforts, the EU offers political, economic and trade opportunities as well as financial assistance to countries which respect human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. These are values to which Belarus has already committed itself, of its own free will, as a member of the United Nations, the OSCE and other organisations, but which the current Belarusian government in practice does not respect. To build the deeper relationship which we wish to have between the EU and the Belarusian people, to end the self-imposed isolation which the Belarusian government has brought upon its country's citizens, we ask that the Belarusian authorities should, first and foremost:

- respect the **right** of the people of Belarus **to elect their leaders democratically** – their right to hear all views and see all election candidates; the right of opposition candidates and supporters to campaign without harassment, prosecution or imprisonment; independent observation of the elections, including by Belarusian non-governmental organisations; their freedom to express their will and have their vote fairly counted;
- respect the **right** of the people of Belarus **to independent information**, and to **express themselves freely** e.g. by allowing journalists to work without harassment or prosecution, not shutting down newspapers or preventing their distribution;
- respect the **rights of non-governmental organisations** as a vital part of a healthy democracy – by no longer hindering their legal existence, harassing and prosecuting members of NGOs, and allowing them to receive international assistance;
- **release all political prisoners** – members of democratic opposition parties, members of NGOs and ordinary citizens arrested at peaceful demonstrations or meetings;

- properly and independently **investigate or review the cases of disappeared persons**²;
- ensure the **right** of the people of Belarus **to an independent and impartial judicial system** – with judges who are not subject to political pressure, and without arbitrary and unfounded criminal prosecution or politically-motivated judgements such as locking-up citizens who peacefully express their views;
- end arbitrary **arrest** and **detention**, and ill-treatment;
- respect the **rights and freedoms** of those Belarusian citizens who belong to **national minorities**;
- respect the **rights** of the people of Belarus **as workers** – their right to join a trade union and the right of trade unions to work to defend the people's rights;
- respect the **rights** of the people of Belarus **as entrepreneurs** to operate without excessive intervention by the authorities;
- join the other nations of Europe in abolishing the death penalty;
- make use of the support which the OSCE, the EU and other organisations offer to Belarus to help it respect the rights of its people.

The EU stands ready to renew its relationship with Belarus and its people, as soon as the Belarusian government demonstrates respect for democratic values and for the basic rights of the Belarusian people.

Meanwhile, the EU will continue to provide funding for Belarus to assist regions affected by the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe, or to support the fight against human trafficking, in particular the trafficking of women, across European borders.

At the same time, the EU will continue to work to give the people of Belarus access to independent information in order to allow them to hear all sides of the arguments before drawing their own conclusions. The EU will continue to support the written press and the broadcasting of independent TV and radio programmes to Belarus. The EU will also welcome and provide financial support for Belarusian students studying in European universities.

² Yuri Zakharenko (former Minister of the Interior, disappeared on 7 May 1999), Victor Gonchar (former Vice-President of the Parliament of Belarus, disappeared on 16 September 1999), Anatoly Krasovski (businessman disappeared with Mr Gonchar) and Dmitri Zavadski (cameraman for the Russian TV channel ORT, disappeared on 7 July 2000)