



International Project
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Fostering mutual understanding
and co-operation of the EU with Belarus,
Moldova, Russia and Ukraine 2008 - 2012

Declaration on Belarus-EU Relations

Adopted at the International Workshop organised by BRIDGE Project “Fostering mutual understanding and cooperation of EU with Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine”¹

The workshop took place on October 1-2, 2009 at the Belarusian Trade and Economics University of Consumer Cooperatives (BTEU), Gomel, Belarus under the auspices of the Rector of BTEU, associate professor, PhD in economics Navumchyk A.A., the member of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus.

At the workshop participated 43 distinguished experts of universities and other institutions from five Belarus regions and, as lecturers, five experts in the field of BRIDGE Consortium Members from the EU. When considering the topics on the WS agenda the participants took into account the fact that the Republic of Belarus is - because of historical, economic, geopolitical and similar reasons - interested in having diversified relations both with Russian Federation and the EU. After two days of discussions and exchange of views the participants have adopted the following recommendations concerning the Belarus-EU relations:

- 1.** The participants approve and support the politics of mutual understanding and cooperation between EU and the Republic of Belarus. They welcome the decision of the 13 October 2008 session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the European Union in Luxembourg concerning the resuming of a political dialogue with Belarus.
- 2.** The participants express their wish that adequate instruments regulating the relations between Belarus and EU will be adopted as soon as possible both in the frame of the European neighborhood policy and Eastern partnership, and on bilateral level as well. These instruments should provide a solid legal and

¹ BRIDGE-project is co-financed by the European Commission EuropeAid programme. The coordinator of the project is Professor Dr. Silvo Devetak, Director of ISCOMET – Institute for Ethnic and Regional Studies, Maribor, Slovenia. Members of BRIDGE Consortium are universities and NGOs from Belarus, Germany, Italy, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

political basis for developing an overwhelming cooperation in the future, which is in interest of the Belarus and EU as well.

3. The participants believe that economic and political cooperation between EU and Belarus will be sustainable and more effective in the context of constructive dialogue concerning the development of human rights and basic freedoms, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, participation of people in the decision-making, freedom of expression and information, enhancement of the role of civil society, and more efficient public administration. To this aim they are supporting the results of the first round of human rights dialogue held in May, 2009 in Prague.

4. The participants urge the EU and Belarus authorities to find as soon as possible adequate solutions for facilitating the visa regime as the first step to the elimination of visas, in order to remove obstacles for people to people contacts.

5. The participants were of the opinion that it could be useful if the EU will organize workshops and seminars for academics, leaders of civil society organizations and institutions and members of local governments on European institutional structures on all levels. In addition the EU should provide for training of Belarusian regional, local administrative and institutional staff in order to ensure the human recourses for the EU funded projects and programs.

6. The participants admit that the elimination of unfounded barriers for the Belarusian exports would be an important step further in the EU-Belarus cooperation. A good motion in this direction could be a resumption of Belarus participation in the EU General System of the Trade preferences. Nowadays EU applies to Belarus the trade treatment which it applies to the industrially developed countries, what hurts the economic interests of Belarus and its European partners.

7. The participants were aware of the importance of the cooperation between Belarus and EU regarding environmental policies and programmes. They propose that project of this kind will be inserted into the present and future lines of cooperation. In this regard could be of great value, for instance, in Belarus of the energy-saving technologies and the experiences of using renewable and alternative energy in the European Union.

8. The participants consider the BRIDGE-project, which is co-financed by the European Aid program, as a very important, constructive and up-to-date initiative, which contributes really to the development of good-neighbourly relations in Europe and in particular to the establishment of bilateral and multilateral contacts among experts, professors, students, civil society leaders, member of local communities' bodies and similar people of good will on both sides of the EU external border. Prof. Dr. Silvo Devetak and his team worked out very effective forms of opinion and information exchange that is a precondition for closer overwhelming cooperation. As to Belarus the BRIDGE Project promotes in Belarusian society the aims and achievements of the EU and, hopefully, will further promote among the relevant EU structure and among companies of the EU countries also the Belarus projects and proposals for cooperation. The participants expressed the opinion that it will be possible to achieve until the conclusion of BRIDGE Project in 2012 significant results concerning the consolidation of the situation and development of cooperation on the European continent. The participants reaffirm in this context their conviction that the borders of EU should be not new "division lines" but lines of friendship between people and good-neighbourhood between states.

9. The participants requested Prof.Dr. Silvo Devetak as a BRIDGE Coordinator to distribute this Declaration among the relevant bodies of the EU, Belarus and of the member states as well.

Gomel, 2 October 2009