

Annual Review of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus and Activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2016

The international environment in 2016 was characterised by persistence of elevated instability and increased factors of uncertainty caused among other things by ongoing global transformational processes and the negative impact of both traditional and new challenges and threats.

Confrontational rhetoric of the leading world players prevailed over uniting initiatives against the background of upset equilibrium in checks and balances system, insufficient mutual trust and lack of readiness to compromise. Attempts to gain one-sided advantage caused conflicts of interest and provoked further application of outdated sanctions policy.

The growing terrorist threat and migration crises posed real danger not only to sovereignty and independence of certain states, but also to preservation of identity and uniqueness of entire regions.

In fairly complicated international context, the efforts of Belarusian diplomacy were aimed at pursuing a balanced multi-vector foreign policy in line with objectives defined by the Head of State, as well as at comprehensive protection of national interests, strengthening regional security and stability.

Significant progress was made in eliminating restrictive measures that impede the development of mutually beneficial cooperation of Belarus with other countries and inter-state institutions.

During the elections of the Parliament of the Republic of Belarus, which took place in a calm and business-like atmosphere, constructive engagement with international observers from the OSCE, CIS, PACE, SCO and other organizations (more than 900 observers) was provided. Balanced and calm assessments of the process and outcomes of the election campaign create preconditions for further intensification of interaction of Belarus in various fields with a number of countries and international organizations.

Belarus sought to make its contribution to addressing global problems, countering modern challenges and threats, was traditionally an active participant of the UN and other international organizations activities.

An important and timely initiative was the decision of the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko to launch a new broad-scale negotiating format comparable to the Helsinki Process to discuss the future of relations between the West and the East.

The Belarusian side made significant efforts to resolve the crisis in neighbouring Ukraine, providing all the necessary conditions for holding regular meetings of the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine and thematic working groups in its structure. The November meeting of the “Normandy format” foreign ministers in the capital of Belarus confirmed that Minsk continues to be a key negotiating platform for the Ukrainian crisis resolution.

Results of comprehensive efforts contributed to strengthening of the international standing and changing of the perception of our country in the international arena, as well as realizing its true value as a “pole of stability” in the region.

As a responsible member of the international community, the Republic of Belarus acceded to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Thus, our country joined the global transition process to a low carbon economy.

Openness of Belarus towards cooperation on any issue including human rights was proved by adopting the first National Human Rights Plan for 2016-2019 to be implemented by the Government in cooperation with state and non-state actors. Belarus is among 40 countries in the world that already have such programmes.

Relations with a strategic partner of Belarus, the Russian Federation, remained traditionally active.

In a complex environment of formation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Republic of Belarus continued to consistently protect its national interests and strongly pursue its principle position of promoting four fundamental economic freedoms of goods, services, capital and labour, eliminating internal barriers and creating equal conditions for economic entities of all Member states.

The fact, that the European Union and the United States lifted most of the sanctions against Belarus, allows expecting, that the process of normalization of relations becomes irreversible and cooperation reaches a new level, corresponding to the objective potential and the needs of the parties.

In 2017 the Republic of Belarus will preside for the first time in the Central European Initiative (CEI).

A landmark event is the decision to hold a regular session of the OSCE PA in Minsk (July 2017) for the first time in our country’s history.

Trust-based comprehensive strategic partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation relations were established with the People’s Republic of China.

Systematic work was conducted to boost contacts with promising partners and allies in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The year of 2016 was characterised by a continuing trend for increased intensity of the top and high level international contacts. 65 foreign visits were paid abroad by the President, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus and by official foreign delegations to Belarus at a reciprocal level.

During the past 25 years of the country’s independence, the network of Belarusian diplomatic missions was continuously expanded and optimized. As of today, the Republic of Belarus has diplomatic missions in 59 countries. Belarus diplomatic missions were set up in Georgia and Spain in 2016. The Embassy of Belarus fully restored its operation in Sweden. Taking into account

ambassadors with concurrent accreditation, Belarus is thus represented in 116 of the 177 countries, with which our country has diplomatic relations.

In 2016 the Embassy of Austria was opened in Belarus. The Head of the Dutch diplomatic mission started his service in Minsk.

Main efforts in the sphere of foreign trade were focused on expanding mutually beneficial relations with traditional partners and developing new markets, diversification of Belarusian exports as one of the conditions for ensuring the state's economic security. The long term objective is to reach a more balanced distribution of Belarusian exports in key directions: that of the EAEU, EU and the "far arc" countries, thus reducing vulnerability of the national economy to stressful situations.

Comprehensive assistance was provided for national exporters. Measures were taken to improve the business climate. In the World Bank Group report "Doing Business 2017", Belarus ranked 37th among 190 countries, and moved up as many as 13 points compared with the previous year. For the second consecutive year Belarus is among the top 30 countries by such an indicator as "international trade".

1. Dynamics of **Belarus-Russia** allied relations was reinforced by intensive top and high level contacts, various forms of intergovernmental and intersectoral cooperation, which ensured high-quality contents of the bilateral dialogue.

Belarus and Russia continued to carry out joint defence and border policy and to coordinate activities in military area. Numerous joint programmes and activities were implemented.

The Russian Federation kept its position as a key trade and investment partner as well as the major export market for Belarusian manufacturers. Russia accounted for nearly a half of the whole Belarus foreign trade. By the volume of mutual trade Belarus ranked among the five Russia's largest trade partners.

Significant joint investment projects were carried out, the largest of which was the nuclear power plant construction in Belarus.

Economic cooperation results would have been better if equal economic conditions had been reached, disputes in the oil and gas sector had been settled, industrial and investment cooperation had been increased, market access for goods and services of both states had been improved, problems in the field of agricultural products supplies had been eliminated, border crossing regime for third countries' citizens through the Belarusian-Russian border had been established.

Foreign ministries of Belarus and Russia traditionally closely coordinated their activities. This contributed to strengthening of the two countries' positions in the international arena. More than 20 consultations on various inter-ministerial cooperation areas were held in the framework of the Programme of

agreed measures in the field of foreign policy of member-states of the Agreement on establishment of a Union State for the years 2016-2017.

The work on ensuring equality of rights of Belarusian and Russian citizens in the two countries was continued, particularly noticeable in education and healthcare, in access to the social protection and employment systems, in provision of mobility freedom and the right to choose one's residence.

Regional cooperation continues to develop fruitfully. 68 delegations from Russian regions visited Belarus during the year. 24 of them were headed by Governors. The 3rd Forum of the Regions of Belarus and Russia was held in Minsk in June 7-8.

2. **Integration track** has been among the top priorities of the Foreign Ministry's activities.

Within the framework of Kazakhstan's chairmanship in the **Eurasian Economic Union**, the year of 2016 was declared the Year of Deepening Economic Cooperation of EAEU with third Countries and was marked by preparation of international preferential trade agreements. While supporting this approach, Belarus at the same time stands for the necessity to prioritize in the first instance the domestic strengthening of the Union, in particular by establishing equal conditions for economic entities, eliminating existing barriers and restrictions in mutual trade, strengthening of industrial cooperation and advancing the energy sector.

In 2016 the Concept of establishment of the Union's common crude oil and refined products markets was reconfirmed and that was considered by Belarus as an important milestone. The concept declares common principles of price formation to all economic entities irrespective of the Union's member state they belong to.

In 2016 final agreement was reached on the amended version of the EAEU Customs Code. The document takes into account all progressive standards of international practice, allows to significantly accelerate and simplify export and import transactions between economic entities of the Union's countries and to increase the investment attractiveness and transit potential of the Republic of Belarus.

As a country at the Western boundary of the EAEU, Belarus consistently advocates for developing sustainable mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation with the European Union. The Belarusian side believes that Eurasian integration should not be limited to the western direction. A major task should be a close collaboration with states and economic alliances in the East: China, Asia-Pacific states, including also within the framework of the SCO and other regional associations.

It was no coincidence that in October 2016, the MFA of Belarus became the venue of the international conference "Laying the foundation in the UNECE region for economic integration and sustainable development towards 2030".

This was a major event, which brought together a wide circle of diplomats, experts and representatives of international organizations to discuss possible ways of expanding economic cooperation between integrations throughout the Eurasian region.

Within the **Commonwealth of Independent States** the issue of the CIS adaptation to modern realities was the central one in 2016. Belarus consistently advocated for the preservation of the CIS as a regional international organization, which provides interaction of its member states in the entire range of collaboration areas. As a result, the informed and balanced Decision of the CIS Council of Heads of States “On adaptation of the Commonwealth of Independent States to modern realities” was adopted in Bishkek on September 16, recognizing the need to preserve the organization and defining directions of its gradual reform to improve the CIS efficiency.

The President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko announced specific proposals on the CIS strengthening at the meeting with the heads of delegations at the CIS Council of Heads of the Governments in Minsk on October 28.

The CIS member states maintain common views on the major regional and global issues. This was confirmed by the adoption in 2016 of the Joint Statements of the CIS Heads of States on the issue of drug trafficking, countering international terrorism and on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Nuremberg Trials.

3. Relations with the **CIS** member-states and Georgia occupied an important place among the Belarus foreign policy priorities.

Contacts at the top and high levels confirmed the constructive relations with **Ukraine**. Progress in developing a barrier-free environment for bilateral economic cooperation made it possible to retain positive mutual trade dynamics.

Belarus continued its multidimensional cooperation with **Kazakhstan** and maintained a productive top level dialogue. A bilateral cooperation roadmap for 2017-2018 was signed by the countries thus creating necessary conditions for increasing of mutual trade.

Considerable attention was paid to the development of a large-scale cooperation with **Turkmenistan**. The President of Turkmenistan visited Belarus (May 10-12), thus, continuing tradition of annual exchange of the top level visits. Implementation of the agreements that were reached ensures further strengthening of bilateral relations in trade, economic and humanitarian fields.

Belarus-**Azerbaijan** partnership continued to develop gradually. The visit of the Belarusian Head of State to Baku (November 28-29) contributed to maintaining a high level of bilateral relations and identifying new areas of economic cooperation.

Relationships with **Armenia** developed in a traditionally friendly manner with active use of integration unions' platforms.

Relations with **Georgia** and **Moldova** were marked by positive dynamics. The visit of the Prime Minister of Georgia to Belarus (March 22-23) and the first national exhibition of Belarus in Tbilisi in September were aimed at deepening the political dialogue and expanding economic cooperation. The official visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus to Georgia (December 20) and the opening of the Belarusian diplomatic mission in Georgia contributed to further establishment of full format relations.

The visit of the Prime Minister of Belarus to Moldova (October 2-3) facilitated securing of agreements on implementation of the economic projects carried out by Belarusian enterprises in this country.

The intensity of contacts with **Uzbekistan** increased significantly. The meeting of the President of Belarus with acting Head of Uzbekistan in Samarkand (October 6) gave a strong impetus to the bilateral ties development.

Relations with **Kyrgyzstan** developed in a constructive manner. The resumed assembling production of Belarus tractors in Bishkek and expansion of industrial cooperation were a significant result of intergovernmental dialogue.

More intensive contacts between Belarus and **Tajikistan** foreign ministries positively influenced diversification of economic relations and the level of cooperation in international organizations.

The work of intergovernmental commissions (IGC) remained an effective mechanism for the development of trade, economic and humanitarian relations with the CIS countries. Meetings of IGCs were held with Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

4. The dialogue of Belarus with the **European Union** developed in a positive manner. Removal of the most of restrictive measures against Belarus in February 2016 was an important event in gradual normalization of relations.

Intensity of political contacts and their level continued to grow. High-level representatives of the European External Action Service (June, November, December), of the European Commission (February, June, October, November, December), of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights (March), of the European Parliament (May) and of the EU member-states visited Belarus. It was the first time that the Political and Security Committee of the EU Council delegation composed of all 28 EU member states permanent representatives had come to Belarus on November 20-21. The delegation was received by the President of the Republic of Belarus.

The established Belarus-EU Coordination Group became a new format of a structured dialogue between the parties. Two meetings of the Unit were held during the year.

Belarus and the EU signed a Joint Declaration on Mobility Partnership. New rounds of sectoral dialogues on economy and finance, customs and

environment were held. A trade dialogue was launched. A dialogue on human rights with the EU was continued. Agreements have been reached to renew the dialogue on energy and expand similar dialogues to areas such as agriculture, standardization, research and innovation.

With the support of the European Commission the first Belarusian-European Investment Forum was held in Vienna in May 2016.

The mandate of the European Investment Bank to cooperate with Belarus was approved. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development adopted a new Strategy for Belarus, providing cooperation of the Bank with the public sector of Belarus.

Belarus continued to participate actively in multilateral events within the Eastern Partnership initiative (EaP) that is currently based on the principle of differentiation. Belarusian representatives took part in the annual EaP Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels (May), two rounds of informal ministerial dialogues in Kiev (July) and Yerevan (November) as well as sectoral ministerial conferences on environment and climate and on digital economy.

The EU technical assistance for Belarus increased to 27 million euros. In this area Belarus cooperates with the EU within TAIEX, MOST and Erasmus Mundus programmes, as well as the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. The implementation of the EU cross-border cooperation programmes “Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus” and “Poland-Belarus-Ukraine” continued. The content of Belarus and the EU partnership priorities for the years 2017-2020 are being under consideration.

5. Bilateral relations with **European countries** were developing intensively being in line with gradual normalization of the dialogue. The work on advancing the contractual-legal framework over a whole range of cooperation areas was intensified. Stagnation in inter-parliamentary dialogue with EU member states was overcome.

Cooperation with neighbouring countries was characterised by positive dynamics. Contacts with **Latvia** were upheld at various levels. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defence and the Minister of the Interior of Belarus made visits to Latvia, while the Latvian Minister of Transport and Communications and the Minister of Economics were received in Minsk. For the first time in many years the Prime Minister of Belarus visited Latvia (November 5).

Regular dialogue with **Lithuania** continues. Two rounds of ministerial consultations at the level of deputy ministers, and the XII Belarus-Lithuania Economic Forum (May 26-27, Lida) were held. At the same time the position of the Lithuanian side with regards to certain aspects of the Belarusian NPP construction posed a problem for bilateral cooperation development.

Bilateral contacts between Belarus and **Poland** intensified considerably. For the first time since 2008, reciprocal visits of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of

the two countries took place. The Deputy Prime Minister – Minister of Economic Development and Finance of Poland visited Minsk to conduct a regular meeting of the economic inter-governmental commission (October 24). The visit to Belarus of the Marshal of the Sejm of Poland became the first full-scale visit of the EU legislative body leader over the past twenty years. Two intergovernmental commissions – Cross-border and Economic commissions – resumed their work, and the process of negotiating the packages of bilateral agreements on cross-border and environmental issues was renewed. Belarus received visits of the Polish Ministers of Agriculture and Rural Development, Environment, Infrastructure and Development, Marine Economy, as well as a representative delegation of law enforcement, border and customs authorities of Poland. The two countries signed and ratified an intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in education.

Belarus continued direct dialogue at the level of foreign ministers with other Visegrad group countries – **Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic** including exchange of bilateral visits (Hungary, the Czech Republic) and meetings in the framework of international and bilateral high-level events (Slovakia). During the Slovak Presidency in the EU Council, the first in the history of bilateral relations official visit of the Prime Minister of Slovakia to Belarus took place (November 25).

Cooperation with **Germany** developed intensively at various levels. Three meetings of Foreign Ministers were organised within the framework of multilateral events. The official delegation of the German-Belarus parliamentary group visited Belarus for the first time. A session of the Belarus-German working group on trade and investment and a number of joint economic, cultural and humanitarian events took place.

There are signs of positive changes in the development of political contacts with the countries of Northern Europe – **Norway** (a meeting of foreign ministers was organized), **Denmark** and **Finland** (there were ministerial consultations at the level of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus). The State Secretary of the MFA of Sweden made her visit to Belarus.

A delegation of policy directors from the Benelux countries' foreign ministries visited Belarus (May 17).

Cooperation of Belarus with **France** continued to intensify. A meeting of foreign ministers of the two countries within the framework of the EU events in Bratislava, the second session of the Joint Belarusian-French Commission on Economic Cooperation and bilateral business forums in Minsk and Paris took place.

Contacts with **Great Britain** became more active. On February 9, the Director-General for Political Affairs of the British MFA visited Belarus. On October 10-13 in the framework of activities related to expansion of trade and economic cooperation, HRH Prince Michael of Kent, member of the British

Royal family made his trip to Belarus.

The Head of State paid visits to **Turkey** (April 13), **Italy** and **Vatican** (May 20-21). Belarus received the Grand Chancellor of the Order of Malta (April 24-26) and the President of Turkey (November 11). There were 18 visits of the foreign ministers of European countries and their deputies to Belarus, as well as ministerial consultations with 17 European countries and sessions of economic intergovernmental commissions – Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, France and the Czech Republic.

6. The ongoing development of relations with the **United States of America** in areas of mutual interest continued. The visit of a high-level delegation from Belarus to the United States (December 6-10) allowed discussing the possibility of consistent building-up of economic cooperation between the two countries. The visits of Belarusian delegations to Texas, California and Florida contributed to the development of inter-regional cooperation.

On September 22, Belarus and the USA signed the first in twenty years intergovernmental agreement (on protection and preservation of cultural values). Bilateral military cooperation was re-established. The dialogue on human rights was continued. A joint project on equipment of the Belarusian state border with modern infrastructure to combat illegal transit of nuclear and radioactive materials is being implemented successfully.

7. Building up of cooperation with **Africa** and the **Middle East**, where our major economic interests lie, has been among the priorities of the Belarusian foreign policy.

Belarus continued systematic work on the development of relations with the countries of the African continent, most of which are our relatively new partners. During the year, Belarusian high-level delegations visited Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Morocco, Sudan, Ethiopia, South Africa and other countries. The Deputy Prime Minister – the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of Namibia, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, heads of the African Export-Import Bank and heads of various sectoral ministries of Angola, Sierra Leone and Mozambique paid visits to Belarus.

The events organised together with African countries contributed to both intensification of political relations and promotion of trade and economic cooperation in export of Belarusian mining, freight, road-building and agricultural machinery, petrochemical products and other goods.

Systematic efforts are made on the development of cooperation with the **Gulf countries**. The President of the Republic of Belarus' visits to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (October-November) contributed to intensification of trade, economic and investment cooperation. To complement and further develop the reached agreements, the Minister of Finance and Minister of Transport and Communications of Qatar as well as Director General of the

Qatar Investment Agency visited Belarus. Minsk hosted the third meeting of Belarus-UAE joint committee on cooperation and a representative delegation headed by the State Minister of Foreign Affairs of UAE attended the event.

The dialogue with our partners in Africa and the Middle East in the framework of international organizations continues. In 2016 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, meetings of the Belarus Foreign Minister and the foreign ministers of Angola, Mozambique, Oman, Syria, and Eritrea were organized.

Negotiations on trade and economy in the framework of intergovernmental commissions and committees became more intense – there were sessions of these structures with Egypt, Qatar, Mozambique, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Sudan.

In view of the continuing difficult situation in **Syria** in September 2016 the Republic of Belarus provided this country with humanitarian assistance. A flight organized by the Ministry for Emergency Situations delivered food, medicines, blankets, hygiene supplies, children's clothing and shoes.

8. In 2016, Belarus established new high dynamics of political and economic dialogue with traditional and new partners in **Asia**.

The state visit of the President of the Republic of Belarus to **China** (September 28-30) marked a new stage in bilateral relations that developed into the level of “trust-based comprehensive strategic partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation”. Thus, Belarus joined the group of countries (alongside with the UK, Pakistan, and Russia) that have special relationships with China.

As an outcome of the visit Belarusian beef and dairy products gained access and contracts were concluded for new products to enter Chinese market. In the field of investment and financial cooperation there are signs of transition to direct investments (equity participation of Chinese enterprises, agreements on the establishment of new joint ventures). An interbank loan was raised and a fund was established to support joint projects.

In humanitarian and scientific cooperation field new tranches were allocated as grants for the construction of social housing and the “Great Stone” industrial park facilities, as well as for training of Belarusian specialists. 10 million US dollars was allocated as co-financing of research projects in certain areas. A Belarusian-Chinese analytical development centre was established.

An agreement on the opening of Belarus Consulate General in Guangzhou was reached.

For the first time Belarus delegation led by the Prime Minister took part as an observer in the 16+1 forum on Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (November, Riga).

Belarus continued its active multidimensional cooperation with **Pakistan**. 17 agreements and contracts were signed during the second official visit of the

President of Belarus to the country (October 4-6). The fourth business and investment forum was held, resulting in signing of a number of contracts.

The meeting of the Head of State and the Prime Minister of **India** N.Modi during the SCO summit in Tashkent was an important step forward in advancing Belarus' interests in the Asian region.

Bilateral relations with **Iran** have been developing dynamically. A number of high-level reciprocal visits were organized. Within the framework of the 13th meeting of the Belarusian-Iranian Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation the two countries signed a roadmap for the development of cooperation between Belarus and Iran in 2016-2017.

Indonesia is the Belarus' key trade and economic partner in South-East Asia. The country's large market enables further increase in potash fertilizers export from Belarus. First large-scale project on deliveries of Belarusian BelAZ dump trucks to Indonesia has been launched.

The Agreement on Free Trade Zone between the EAEU and **Vietnam** that entered into force in October 2016, as well as the Belarus-Vietnam intergovernmental Protocol on supporting the production of motor vehicles on the territory of Vietnam open new opportunities for strengthening the positions of the Belarusian machine-building products and others on the Vietnamese market and in the region in general.

The Belarusian side was actively involved in the activities through the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization** (SCO). The Head of State took part in the SCO summit (June 23-24, Tashkent). For the first time, the Prime Minister of Belarus took part in a meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Governments (November 2-3, Bishkek).

For the first time after Belarus was granted the status of the observer-state at the **Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia** (CICA) the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus took part in the meeting of the foreign ministers of the CICA member-states (April 26-29, Beijing).

There were 11 sessions of intergovernmental commissions, committees and working groups on economic cooperation with the countries of the region held during the year, some of which were organised for the first time (China, Pakistan, Cambodia, Korea, Iran, Vietnam), as well as seven rounds of foreign ministries' consultations (Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran, India).

The margins of international events saw the meetings between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus and the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, North Korea, China, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Japan. These events gave an additional impetus to the development of bilateral relations.

9. Strengthening of dialogue with priority partners, geographic expansion of bilateral contacts and economic ties in promising industries for Belarus contributed to the development of cooperation with Latin American countries.

Implementation of this strategy was facilitated by the first visit to Belarus of the Ecuador parliamentary delegation headed by the Chairman of the National Assembly of Ecuador, the official visit of the First Deputy Chairman of the State Council and the Council of Ministers of Cuba, meetings of Belarus Foreign Minister with his colleagues from Argentina, Costa Rica and Ecuador, visits of Belarus Foreign Ministry leadership to Chile and Uruguay.

This was the first time that the Republic of Belarus had participated as an observer in the **Association of Caribbean States Summit** (June 4, Havana).

The first meeting of the joint Belarusian-Cuban Commission on Science and Technology Cooperation held in Havana contributed to expansion of cooperation with the countries in the region. Parties approved a Program of the Belarusian-Cuban scientific, technological and innovation cooperation for 2016-2018.

A new form of export promotion was adopted in the Ministry. Mexico and Chile were visited by a Belarusian monitoring group with presentations of Belarus export potential for the businesses of the countries.

Belarusian export credit mechanisms and other export support tools were introduced as a part of the exports diversification activities.

Belarusian trade with Latin America in 2015 increased by more than four times compared to 2000. Belarusian export grew faster and increased by more than six times. In 2016 the export dynamics was slower due to the crisis in the countries that are Belarus major trade partners in the region.

10. Multilateral diplomacy. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus headed the Belarus official delegation at the 71st session of the UN General Assembly. Belarus Foreign Minister participated in several high level events, had a number of bilateral meetings with colleagues from other countries and with the UN management. The Minister chaired a constitutive ministerial meeting with the like-minded group of countries supporters of middle-income countries.

Consecutive work on implementation of Belarus foreign initiatives was carried out. In particular during the 25th session of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (May, Vienna) a Belarus resolution on preventing and combating trafficking in human organs and trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ removal was adopted. A “group of friends” united in fighting against trafficking in persons was organized and under Belarus chairmanship met at a number of meetings in Vienna, Geneva, New-York and Paris i.a. to define directions of future activities on different platforms.

It was the first time that a Belarus initiated resolution on targeting new psychoactive substances had been adopted at the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs session (March, Vienna).

A Deputy Foreign Minister led Belarus delegation that took part in the **XVIII Non-Aligned Movement summit** (September 17-18, Island of Margarita).

An important result of the MFA's work in human rights protection area was adoption by the Belarus Government of a National Plan of Actions of the Republic of Belarus (October 24). The document encompassed recommendations suggested to Belarus as a result of the UN Second Universal Periodic Review and those given by other human rights treaty bodies. The plan was the result of collective work of interested state management authorities. At the same time, civil society was involved in the discussion of the document.

Visible positive changes took place in cooperation of Belarus with **UNIDO** – our key partner in the UN system on the issues of modernization of our country's enterprises and infrastructure. Two large jointly implemented infrastructure projects were aimed at modernization of car-production and agriculture enterprises and totally amounted to 2 million US dollars. For the first time Belarus representatives became members in the UNIDO policymaking organs – the Industrial Development Board and the Programme and Budget Committee.

International ecologic cooperation was marked by a significant step forward of the Republic of Belarus – **accession to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change**. Thus, our country joined the global process of transition to a low carbon economy. In this process Belarus acts not as a wingside spectator, but as one of its architects, participating in preparing and making key decisions for the nearest decades.

Cooperation with the IAEA stepped up to a new level. Director General Yukiya Amano and Deputy Director General of the Department of Nuclear Safety and Security Juan Carlos Lentijo visited Belarus in April and got acquainted with the Belarus NPP construction process. Y.Amano was received by the President of the Republic of Belarus. Belarus continued to actively participate in the Agency's activities through membership in the Board of Governors.

Consecutive steps of our country in formation of a new intergovernmental strategy for international cooperation on Chernobyl for the period after 2016 were of significant importance for development of the international Chernobyl cooperation. An international conference dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster was held in April and a new "Chernobyl" resolution was adopted at the 71st UN General Assembly in December.

An important event in the field of humanitarian affairs was the second meeting of the Advisory Council under the MFA on affairs of Belarusians abroad held by the Belarus Foreign Minister (September 5).

11. Systematic work was carried out to maintain constructive cooperation with the **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe** (OSCE), its

executive structures and institutions, and the German presidency of the Organization.

Missions of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Parliamentary Assembly (PA) of the OSCE were invited by the Belarusian side and took part in the international observation of the parliamentary elections in Belarus.

Belarus was visited by the Belarus Director of ODIHR (January), Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (April), Vice-President of the OSCE PA, Special Coordinator of the OSCE short-term observer mission at the presidential and parliamentary elections in Belarus (January, September and December).

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus took part in the informal OSCE ministerial meeting in Potsdam and in the 23rd annual meeting of the OSCE Council of Foreign Ministers in Hamburg.

Belarus and the OSCE executive structures closely cooperated in implementation of joint projects based on the agreed “package” of international technical assistance.

Project cooperation was carried out with the **Council of Europe**, including in the framework of the Council of Europe’s Action Plan for Belarus for the years 2016-2017. It was the first time since 1997 that such a document had been drafted and adopted with account of the positions and priorities of the relevant Belarus ministries and agencies.

The work on our country’s accession to the Council of Europe legal instruments and mechanisms was continued. On December 8, Additional Protocol to the Anti-Doping Convention was signed.

Belarus continued to participate in the activities of subregional organizations. During its presidency in 2017 in the **Central European Initiative**, Belarus intends to pay special attention to the issue of connectivity and interoperability in Europe. In addition to the development of transport and logistics infrastructure this implies harmonization of standards and customs procedures, introduction of information technologies for trade and development of cross-border services, business promotion along the main transport corridors and other activities aimed at creating a “barrier-free environment” for economic, trade and investment cooperation.

Belarus continued to participate as an observer in activities of the **Northern Dimension** partnerships. Pragmatic cooperation was developed with the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the Council of Baltic Sea States, in which Belarus also has an observer status.

12. A systematic work on further development of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was carried out in the context of **national security** protection. At the CSTO Collective Security Council session (October 14, Yerevan) the Republic of Belarus received the chairmanship in the

Organization. During the meeting heads of states signed 17 decisions and adopted four resolutions. Approval of the CSTO Collective Security Strategy until 2025, decision on the reform of the CSTO Joint Staff, decision on a single list of organizations recognized as terrorists and establishment of a Crisis Response Center belong to the list of the most significant documents adopted.

The Belarusian presidency set as priorities qualitative strengthening of the CSTO's international influence, launching a new stage of quick response system to emerging crisis situations and improving operational readiness of the CSTO collective forces, expanding the CSTO agenda to the economic security issues, implementing a set of additional measures to combat international terrorism, multiplying efforts to combat illicit drug trafficking, ensuring a stable migration situation in CSTO collective security regions.

Belarus continued to responsibly fulfil its international obligations in the field of international security, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, conventional arms control, compliance with the sanctions set up in the UN Security Council resolutions, implementation of export controls on military and dual-use goods, works and services.

Belarus continues to contribute to implementation of the anti-personnel mine ban convention through the project "The destruction of PFM-1 series ammunition stockpiled in the Republic of Belarus" and the destruction of about 3.3 mln anti-personnel mines. More than 85 per cent of the total number of anti-personnel mines of this type remaining in Belarus had been destroyed by the end of the year 2016.

13. Economic diplomacy, establishment of favourable conditions for export of goods and services traditionally played a key role in the work of MFA.

Despite worsening price competitiveness of the main Belarusian exports as well as crisis in economies of the main trade partners of Belarus, targeted efforts of the state authorities and exporters, coordinated by MFA, made it possible to reach a balanced foreign trade in 2016.

The Ministry prepared a National Export Development Programme for the years 2016-2017, later adopted by the Government. It envisages a complex of measures to enhance global competitiveness of Belarusian goods.

Significant attention was paid to strengthening of the mutually beneficial relations with traditional economic partners, to developing new markets and export diversification.

The MFA strengthened coordination within Belarus. Seminars on practical work on the Asian, African and Latin America's markets were held for exporters and government officials.

Regular meetings with Belarus exporters are held by the Foreign Ministry's senior staff. The Ministry signed an agreement on cooperation with the Republican Confederation of Entrepreneurship for the years 2016-2020,

which contributes to revitalization of SME's and improves their ability to enter foreign markets.

Information work with exporters was upgraded to a new level. A "Reminder for Belarusian exporters" was prepared to provide information on export activity and an algorithm for economic entities, entering foreign markets. Assistance was provided to the National Centre for Marketing and Price Study (NCMPS) in updating of its web-portal www.export.by to be launched online in its updated version in early 2017.

In 2016, expert monitoring groups visited Chile, Mexico, Tanzania and Mozambique. Foreign ministries expanded their contacts and worked out promising directions of trade and economic cooperation.

NCMPS arranged information exchange with similar foreign organizations, business associations, and expanded its participation in exhibitions.

Further efforts to improve the conditions for the trade with Russia and other partners within the EAEU were continued. Productive talks were held with the Ukrainian partners on abolition of special duties imposed on a number of Belarusian goods imported to Ukraine.

Intensive work was carried out to develop trade relations of the EAEU member states and third countries. On October 5, 2016 a free trade area was created with Vietnam.

There were negotiations initiated on an agreement on trade and economic cooperation with China, on a free trade agreement with Israel, and on an interim agreement with Iran that shall establish a free trade area. Unification of trade regimes was the topic of the EAEU member-states consultations held with Serbia. It is planned to open negotiations on a free trade area with India and Egypt.

Aforementioned agreements form a new environment for active development of new markets, export diversification, facilitation of investment attractiveness, strengthening of industrial and agricultural cooperation, first of all with the so-called "far-arc" countries.

There were national exhibitions organized in Japan (March), Vietnam (April), Iran (May-June) and Georgia (September). Preparation of national expositions was commissioned for the International Exhibition "Expo 2017" in Astana (Kazakhstan) and the "World Expo 2020" in Dubai (UAE).

In 2016, MFA supported more than 200 international events focused on development of investment cooperation and presentation of Belarus economic potential. Special attention was paid to European countries and to the states where Belarus embassies have not yet been opened.

Representatives of foreign organizations and transnational corporations enjoyed MFA's assistance at the International Forum "Broadening the horizons: investment, finance, development" (September 29-30, Minsk); in the XXI

Belarusian Energy and Ecology Forum, and in an exhibition and a congress “Energy. Ecology. Energy saving. Electro 2016” (October 11-13, Minsk).

As it was ordered by the Head of State and the Government, the Ministry invigorated the negotiating process on accession of the Republic of Belarus to the **World Trade Organization** (WTO). Human resources potential was strengthened, a negotiating delegation was formed, proposals on access to goods and services markets were updated.

Belarus efforts to intensify the negotiation process were supported by the majority of WTO member-states.

After consideration of the documents submitted by the Belarusian side, the WTO Secretariat prepared and circulated in December a draft report of the working group on the accession of the Republic of Belarus to the Organization, which will be the basis for a full-scale round of negotiations in January 2017. Distribution of the draft report indicates a high level of preparedness of a candidate country to the final stage of multilateral negotiations.

Enhancing interaction with the **International Monetary Fund** (IMF) on a new IMF program for Belarus was the result of systemic foreign policy efforts during the last years.

14. 108 international **treaties** and other legal documents, 80 bilateral agreements (including those setting up diplomatic relations with the Republic of Liberia, the Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis, the Principality of Monaco) as well as 28 multilateral documents (including Paris agreement, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Convention on the International Maritime Organization) were signed in 2016.

An increasing volume of the Eurasian economic commission decisions went through the international legal expertise in order to protect Belarus national interests and sovereignty.

An agreement between the Republic of Belarus and the Eurasian Economic Union on conditions of residence of the EAEU Court signed on April 29, 2016 should facilitate cooperation of Belarus with the EAEU Court.

The CIS Economic Court undergoes transition into a different *ad hoc* format with respectively reduced staff. It will make it possible to keep this statutory body in new realities and facilitate fair distribution of its financing responsibilities among all of the CIS member-states (currently the Court is financed by Belarus and Russia).

Preparation of the draft and final conclusion of the framework agreement with the UN may significantly simplify organization and conduct of the UN activities in Belarus.

International Arbitration Court at the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry received an observer status at UNCITRAL and this will positively affect international image of Belarus.

Belarus received an observer status in the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization, which will enable to coordinate positions with a significant number of Asian and African states on international law issues, also including those considered at the UN level.

Belarus formalised its participation in the Council of Europe Convention on the counterfeiting of medical products and similar crimes involving threats to public health as well as in the Additional Protocol to the Anti-Doping Convention as of November 16, 1989. This will help to apply progressive international legal instruments of the Council of Europe and improve cooperation in counterfeiting of medical products and fighting against doping.

15. Protection of legitimate rights and interests of Belarusian legal entities and individuals abroad, consular assistance to those in emergency situations as well as visa-regime liberalization are paramount priorities for the MFA of Belarus.

In 2016, more than 2,500 Belarus citizens requested various types of legal support from Belarus embassies abroad. Assistance was rendered to persons detained by foreign law enforcement authorities or enduring punishment in penal institutions. Relatives of Belarus citizens, who died abroad, were provided with necessary assistance, including transportation of the dead bodies to Motherland. Belarus citizens were also assisted in their evacuation from the zones of armed conflict.

Active work was conducted to improve legislation on visa issues. Respective intergovernmental agreements were concluded with Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, Macao, Chili and Estonia. Visa agreements came into force with China, Nicaragua, Brazil and Macao. Domestic procedures were carried out as for agreements with Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala, El-Salvador.

Negotiations on draft agreements regulating travels of diplomatic or official passport holders were ongoing with Algeria, Bahrein, India, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Philippines, Ethiopia and domestic passports holders with Honduras, Hong Kong, Korea, Macedonia, Malaysia, Oman, Peru, Singapore, Uruguay, Philippines.

A draft Executive Order of the President of the Republic of Belarus was prepared to regulate a visa-free entry (exit) of foreign citizens of 80 states coming to Belarus through the checkpoint “National Airport Minsk”. Another Executive Order of the President of Belarus granted a visa free regime to the United Arab Emirates citizens coming to Belarus.

16. In 2016, foreign **media** expressed their interest to cover Belarus related topics. With this in view, information support to domestic and foreign events and initiatives was put at the top of the MFA’s priorities list. More than 250 foreign journalists received a permanent accreditation to work in Belarus.

More than 110 foreign media representatives were issued a temporary accreditation.

Mature technology of quick distribution of information put the MFA's web-site at the top of the most attended among the state governing institutions of Belarus. Considerable progress was observed in MFA's social network activities. The number of MFA Twitter account followers increased by almost one-third and reached more than 15,000. An official Facebook account was opened by the Ministry.