**ANNUAL REVIEW**

**of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus**

**and Activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2015**

The ongoing painful process of transformation towards the multipolar world predetermined the high level of turbulence in international relations, resulting in further growth of crisis phenomena, intensification of regional conflicts, expansion in geography of terrorism and emergence of numerous artificial economic barriers.

Leading world players concentrated on maintaining and enlarging the areas of their influence, even to the detriment of mutually beneficial cooperation and consolidated efforts in the fight against pressing modern challenges and threats. Serious lack of trust in interstate relations, absence of readiness for compromises and persistent logic of unilateral domination are continuously hindering the elaboration of sustainable mechanisms for solving urgent international problems.

In this international setting and in line with the general policy objectives defined by the Head of State the Belarusian diplomatic service focused its efforts on comprehensive and effective promotion of national interests, provision of a substantial contribution to strengthening of regional security, elimination of sanctions and restrictive measures preventing the development of mutually beneficial relations of Belarus with foreign partners.

The elections of the President of the Republic of Belarus took place in a calm and businesslike atmosphere. Constructive cooperation was ensured with international observers from OSCE, CIS, PACE, SCO and other structures (represented by over 900 observers).

The protection of rights and interests of Belarusian citizens abroad remained in the very spotlight of the Foreign Ministry’s attention. Belarus sought to deliver its contribution to solving global problems, addressing modern challenges and threats, and traditionally actively participated in the activities of the UN and other international organizations.

Belarus consistently facilitated the de-escalation of the crisis in Ukraine based on genuine interest in its swift resolution. As of today, the agreements reached at the “Normandy Four” Summit in Minsk are an internationally recognized tool for solving the conflict through political and diplomatic means.

The Belarusian side ensured all necessary conditions for regular meetings of the trilateral contact group on Ukraine and its thematic working groups. The Republic of Belarus remains firmly committed to the peaceful resolution of the Ukrainian crisis, which will be facilitated by strict implementation of the Minsk agreements by all parties.

Complex efforts undertaken by the Belarusian diplomatic service at the international arena fostered further strengthening of credibility and positive image of our country abroad, underscored the genuine value of Belarus as a stability and security factor in the region, as well as the potential of Minsk in the development of integration processes.

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), launched on January 1, 2015, marked a switch-over to the new quality level of Eurasian integration, broadened horizons of possibilities to implement the concept of “integration of integrations”.

Comprehensive cooperation with the Russian Federation was strengthening in the framework of the Union State as well as within other integration unions at the post-Soviet area.

Positive dynamics of the step-by-step process of normalization of relations with the European Union and the USA was reinforced with the suspension of the restrictive measures against Belarus, making it possible to significantly increase the intensity of contacts at various levels.

Comprehensive strategic partnership with the People’s Republic of China was further developed.

Concrete results were achieved in widening contacts with perspective partners and allies in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Since 1994 the number of states in which the Belarusian foreign missions have been maintained raised from 22 to 56. Together with ambassadors accredited on a concurrent basis, Belarus is represented in 122 out of 174 countries, with which the state has diplomatic relations.

Growth of the international authority of the Republic of Belarus and improvement of its attractiveness in terms of trade and economic relations and cooperation in other fields is reflected in the process of the foreign diplomatic network expansion in our country.

At present there are 46 foreign embassies, 4 offices of the embassies, 2 trade missions, 35 consular institutions, 16 offices of international organizations in Belarus. 86 foreign embassies are accredited in Belarus concurrently and operate from Moscow, Vilnius, Warsaw, Kiev.

In July 2015 the first meeting of the Advisory Council under the MFA on affairs of Belarusians abroad was held, attended by representatives of the Belarusian organizations from 18 countries. The Ministry prepared a draft sub-program “Belarusians in the World” of the State program “Culture of Belarus” for the years 2016-2020.

In the field of economic diplomacy much attention was paid to strengthening of mutually beneficial relations with traditional economic partners of Belarus, to developing new markets and export diversification as one of the prerequisites for sustainable economic development and improvement of the living standards of citizens.

Comprehensive assistance was provided to national exporters, as well as to improvements of the business climate and the business process simplification in Belarus.

Despite unfavorable external environment and crisis phenomena in economies of the Belarus’ major trading partner countries, joint and determined efforts made it possible to achieve a more balanced foreign trade in goods and services in the year 2015.

1. **Belarus-Russia** allied relations have been developing dynamically. Intensive contacts at high and the highest levels, various forms of political and economic partnership ensured exuberant and productive bilateral relations that allowed resolving topical issues in constructive manner.

Numerous joint programmes and activities were implemented. Traditionally close cooperation was observed between Russian and Belarus foreign offices that contributed to the strengthening of the two countries’ international positions. On the Joint Board session held in October the next Programme of agreed measures in the field of foreign policy of the Union States for the years 2016-2017 was adopted.

Belarus and Russia continued joint defense and border policy, coordinated activities in the field of military building.

The plan of Belarus-Russian international initiatives dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War was successfully performed.

The Russian Federation remained its positions both as a key trade and investment partner as well as the major export market for Belarusian manufacturers. Traditionally Russia accounts for nearly a half of the whole Belarus foreign trade. In the volume of mutual trade Belarus ranks among the 5 Russia’s largest trade partners.

The Belarus-Russia intergovernmental plan to create additional conditions for the development of trade and economic cooperation was signed in March. It is aimed at further integration of the economies and reduction in administrative obstacles in the field of mutual trade.

Significant joint investment projects are being realized, the largest of which is the nuclear power plant construction in Belarus.

The cooperation at regional level has considerably intensified. 40 delegations headed by the leaders of Russian regions visited the country during the year. In September 2015 the Second Forum of the Regions of Russia and Belarus, dedicated to the Union State’s industrial policy, was held in Sochi and attended by the two Presidents.

The two states systematically move forward in the direction of ensuring equal rights to the Belarus and Russian citizens. In December 2015 Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the law according to which the Belarusian citizens are no longer obliged to take exams in the Russian language, history and legislation basics of the Russian Federation in order to get residence permit or the permission for temporary residence in the country.

Belarus-Russian partnership has been intensively developing in humanitarian and cultural fields. The Business and Cultural Complex of the Belarusian Embassy in Russia started to operate in Moscow.

2. **Integration pursue** has been among top priorities in the Foreign Ministry agenda.

Since January 1, 2015 **the Eurasian Economic Union** (EAEU) Agreement came into force with the Republic of Armenia and the Kyrgyz Republic joining it in the course of the year. Belarus was entitled to the honorable **mission to take the first presidency in the EAEU**. Results of our work were highly appraised by our integration partners.

In the framework of implementation of the Belarusian presidency initiatives main directions of industrial cooperation under the EAEU were agreed on, the concept of establishing common electric power market was confirmed and a full package of necessary regulations was adopted to ensure the launch of a common market of medicines and medical products from January 1, 2016.

The Republic of Belarus initiated establishment of a new consultative format of macroeconomic policy coordination at the level of heads of central banks, finance and economy ministries.

At the same time a breakthrough in the key issue settlement, complete revocation of all confiscations and limitations in mutual trade, failed to be realized. That issue is to be actively addressed by the second concord of the Eurasian Economic Commission starting to operate in February 2016.

The EAEU international partnership has been developing fruitfully. Under the Belarus presidency a draft memorandum, titled “Eurasian Economic Union – European Union: prospects for cooperation” was prepared and handed over to the European Commission. The Foreign Ministry prepared composite presentation edition “40 questions about the Eurasian Economic Union” aimed at wide readership. A Free Trade Zone Agreement was signed between the EAEU and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Leaders of the EAEU member-states agreed to start negotiations with the People’s Republic of China on a partnership and cooperation agreement in economics, and with Israel on a free trade agreement. Expert assessment is under way to elaborate concrete proposals on bridging the EAEU with the Silk Road Economic Belt.

Considerable attention was paid to building-up of cooperation within **the Commonwealth of Independent States**. At the initiative of Belarus the Plan on the Commonwealth member-states’ joint cooperation in settling fundamental issues in the economic and financial areas was adopted.

The CIS Heads of States Council passed the Action Plan for implementation of the third stage of the CIS Economic Development Strategy until the year 2020. Activities under the plan are aimed at realization of educational, scientific and technical potential of the Commonwealth member-states, new infrastructure projects, intensification of economy, etc.

Following the summit of the CIS Heads of States Council a package of documents was signed, including the Address by the CIS Heads of States on the 30th Anniversary of the accident at the Chernobyl NPP, as well as the Statement on Fighting International Terrorism, that clearly showed the stand of the CIS leaders towards this global problem.

Active stand of Belarus contributed to the Commonwealth preserving its demand as an authoritative international organization, in which framework many topical for post-Soviet states problems are being addressed including the functioning of the free trade zone.

3. **Bilateral agenda with CIS member-states** and Georgia was traditionally eventful despite negative economic tendencies, devaluation of a range of national currencies and shrinking of certain partner-states markets.

Political dialogue with **Ukraine** also developed in a constructive manner, considering the background of Minsk efforts to peaceful settlement of the situation in the east of the country. Ukraine is the third major Belarus trade partner, thus countermeasures were taken as to ensure unhindered environment for bilateral economic relations.

Wide-scale partnership with **Kazakhstan** remains one of the priorities within the CIS region. Joint cooperation projects were continued, development of cooperation in inter-parliamentary, scientific and technical fields was fast-tracked. With the view of enhancing bilateral relations various integration institutions were used, the EAEU topping the list.

The agenda of partnership with **Turkmenistan** was no less eventful. The official visit of the Belarus President to Ashgabat on December 10-12, 2015, during which the Week of Belarus Culture and the National fair were held, became the milestone of the bilateral activity. Belarus President took part in the international conference “Policy of Neutrality: International Cooperation for Peace, Safety and Development”.

The visits of Presidents of **Moldova** (June 16-17) and **Azerbaijan** (November 27-28) anchored agreements on implementation of certain economic projects, reaffirmed mutual determination to support the high level of bilateral relations.

**Kyrgyzstan’s** joining the EAEU boosted bilateral contacts at governmental and foreign offices level, stimulated economic cooperation.

Belarus-**Georgia** relations reached a new level of quality. On April 22-24 the visit of Belarus President to Georgia took place and was followed with considerable enhancement of the bilateral legal basis, economic ties development, as well as regional partnership were spurred up.

Relationships with **Armenia** and **Tajikistan** developed in a traditionally friendly manner. Various level contacts being upheld including through the CIS and the CSTO.

After a long term break the Intergovernmental Commission on bilateral cooperation with **Uzbekistan** restarted its work. Similar instrument was also actively resorted in the course of trade, industrial, scientific and technical cooperation development with Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

4. The dialogue of Belarus with **the European Union** was generally characterized by positive dynamics. The suspension of the EU restrictive measures against Belarus in October 2015 became an important milestone in the context of general normalization of the relations.

The intensity as well as the level of political contacts considerably increased. A number of visits to the Republic of Belarus of high-ranking representatives of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission as well as of the delegation of the European Parliament for relations with Belarus took place. The President of the Republic of Belarus met with the Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations J.Hahn, Deputy Secretary General of the External Action Service H.Schmid, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia E.Rinkēvičs (as the Presidency of the Council of the EU).

In December 2015 during the Belarus Foreign Minister paid a working visit to Brussels and met with the EU Foreign Ministers, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy F.Mogherini, EU Commissioner J.Hahn, NATO Deputy Secretary General A.Vershbow.

Consultations on modernization issues with the EU to determine the best form of cooperation between the Government of Belarus and the European Union in this sphere, Belarus – EC negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements as well as on establishing the Mobility Partnership were held. Further rounds of sectoral dialogues on environment, economy and finance were held. The human rights dialogue was renewed with the EU. A Cooperation Arrangement between the European Commission and Belarus on an Early Warning Mechanism in the area of energy was concluded.

Belarus actively participated in the events of the multilateral track of the **“Eastern Partnership”** (EaP). Belarus Foreign Minister participated in the EaP Summit in Riga (May 21-22). For the first time a round of informal EaP ministerial dialogues on environment was held in Minsk (June 29).

Establishment of a new EaP working group on harmonization of the digital markets of the EU Member States and the EaP countries became a concrete outcome of the determined work on the promotion of the respective Belarusian initiative.

Cooperation with the EU in the field of technical assistance was effectively developing, including also activities under the EU National Indicative Programme for Belarus and EU cross-border cooperation programmes “Lithuania-Latvia-Belarus” and “Poland-Ukraine-Belarus”.

5. Bilateral relations with **European** **countries** based on pragmatic cooperation in various fields were characterized by the increased intensity and level of bilateral contacts.

Political dialogue with **Germany** reached a remarkably new level. In February 2015, Belarus Foreign Minister visited the Federal Republic of Germany to participate in Munich security conference. In November 2015, for the first time in many years, an official visit of the head of the Belarusian Foreign Service to Germany was made at the invitation of the German party.

A number of inter-agency cooperation tools were improved and bilateral cooperation agenda was extended. Fruitful activity of the bilateral business group on trade and investments was ensured. Days of the both economies were organized in Minsk and Berlin, actively attended by business representatives.

The Prime-Minister of Belarus visited **Italy** (September 9-10) and **Turkey** (November 11-12) to participate in the “EXPO-2015” World Exhibition in Milan and the Belarusian Investment Forum in Istanbul. A number of important bilateral negotiations on the development of mutually beneficial cooperation with the countries mentioned above were held.

The first-ever meeting between the Presidents of Belarus and **Austria** was held during the UN Summit in New-York in September, 2015. The President of the Republic of Belarus also met with the Austrian Foreign Minister (May 4), who paid his first visit to Minsk. It was decided to open the Embassy of the Austrian Republic in Minsk.

Owing to positive developments in the relations with **France** the first session of the bilateral intergovernmental commission on commercial and economic cooperation was held (February 13). A number of joint investment and production projects continued to be implemented.

Cooperation between Belarus and the **Holy See** became more intense. The State Secretary of Vatican visited our country in March 12-15.

Positive dynamic patterns of pragmatic interaction characterized cooperation with the **Baltic countries**. In the framework of the UN Summit, the President of the Republic of Belarus discussed the issues of bilateral cooperation with the President of **Latvia**. Reciprocal visits of Foreign Ministers of Latvia (February 19-20) and Belarus (May 21-22) as well as the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of **Lithuania** to Minsk (November 11-12) were organized.

Trade and economic cooperation as well as a political dialogue with the **Visegrad group** countries (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic) gradually developed. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary made his visit to Belarus in April 28-29.

Relations with **Serbia** positively reinforced. The reciprocal visit of the President of Serbia to Belarus (November 18-19) gave an additional impetus to bilateral cooperation in various fields.

On the sidelines of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Belgrade meetings were held between the Belarus Foreign Minister and the heads of Foreign Services of **Macedonia** and **Montenegro**, which concluded by signing protocols on cooperation between the ministries. An intergovernmental agreement on visa-free travel regime for diplomatic and service passport holders was reached with the Foreign Minister of **Bosnia and Herzegovina**.

The work of the intergovernmental commissions on trade and economic cooperation was activated and with a number of countries – renewed. Meetings of the respective commissions were held with Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, France, the Czech Republic and Switzerland. Ministerial consultations on foreign affairs were conducted with 22 European countries.

6. In a joint constructive effort with the **United States of America**, Belarus continued seeking opportunities for further normalization of the dialogue. Bilateral cooperation in trade, science and technology was actively developing, while humanitarian contacts witnessed further expansion.

In October 2015, the United States provided sanctions relief for a number of Belarusian petrochemical enterprises. The two sides conducted expert consultations on bilateral relations, regional cooperation, human rights, human trafficking, fight against cybercrime and terrorism, Belarus’ accession to the WTO.

In August 2015, a United States Congressional delegation visited Belarus and was received by the Head of State.

On May 9, the U.S. Air Force in Europe Band participated in the Victory Day celebrations in Minsk paying tribute to the common history and relations of the Allies during the Second World War.

The first Honorary Consuls of the Republic of Belarus in the United States were appointed in Texas and Florida.

To capitalize on the progress made, Belarus is interested in bringing sustainability into the process of normalization of its relations with the United States.

7. Belarus continued to actively develop cooperation with the countries of **Africa and the Middle East**, were our considerable economic interests lie.

Consecutive work is conducted with African countries, most of which are relatively new partners of our state. Visits of the Vice President of Zimbabwe, the Minister of International Cooperation of the Republic of Guinea, the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of the Republic of South Africa to Minsk and those of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus to Mozambique and Angola facilitated bilateral political relations, agreements on large deliveries of Belarusian trucks, quarry, road, construction and agricultural machinery.

Belarus also continued its dialogue with traditional partners in Africa. Results of the meeting of the Presidents of the Republic of Belarus and the Arab Republic of Egypt, held within the framework of the UN General Assembly in New York, confirmed mutual interests to activate cooperation on the already established economic and legal basis.

Belarus continued to consecutively develop cooperation with the Persian Gulf states. New impetus was provided to the trade, economy and investment contacts with the United Arab Emirates. New steps forward were made to extend interaction with Saudi Arabia: in May, 2015 a first session of the Joint Intergovernmental Committee was held. Relations with the Sultanate of Oman are characterized by considerably recovered ties between the Foreign Ministries and parliaments.

Belarus renewed dialogues with other traditional Middle East partners. Despite the ongoing armed conflict in **Syria**, there is a tendency to activation of the Belarusian-Syrian cooperation. Perspectives of economic interaction were defined during the official visit of the Belarus Foreign Minister to Syria (February) and also during the 6th meeting of the bilateral intergovernmental committee (April).

Iraq faced serious challenges confronting ISIS, nevertheless the dialogue with this country is viewed by Belarus as perspective.

Number of visits to Qatar, UAE, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel at the level of the Deputy Foreign Minister were important for development of various bilateral cooperation areas with those countries.

8. In view of the rapid economic development of the **Asian** countries and strengthening of their role internationally close attention was paid to maintaining highly dynamic cooperation with the new and traditional partners of Belarus in the Asia-Pacific region, South and Southeast Asia.

The year 2015 was marked by a significant event in the Belarusian-Chinese relations – the first over the past fourteen years state visit of the President of the People’s Republic of **China** (10-12 May). During the state visit a Joined declaration on further development and comprehensive strategic partnership was signed.

President of the Republic of Belarus paid a working visit to China in September 2015. Special importance was attached to expansion of bilateral trade and economic cooperation, inter alia, at the interregional level.

The visit of the Indian President Pranab Mukherjee to Belarus (June 2-4) provided important impetus to the Belarusian-Indian relations. **India** recognized a market status of Belarus and announced its decision to allocate a credit line to our country for a number of important projects.

The year 2015 became a turning point in Belarusian-Pakistani relations. The first in history official visit of the President of the Republic of Belarus to **Pakistan** (May 28-29) and exchange of visits at the highest level stipulated basic institutional framework elaboration to enhance bilateral cooperation in a wide range of areas. A number of bilateral documents were signed, including the Islamabad declaration of bilateral partnership, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, a short and medium-term road map of bilateral cooperation.

A serious step forward was made in cooperation with **Vietnam**. Agreements on strengthening of economic interaction, industrial cooperation and trade turnover growth were reached during the visit of the President of the Republic of Belarus to Hanoi (December 8-9). A Free Trade Agreement signed between the EAEU and Vietnam opens new horizons for development of bilateral trade and economic relations and will facilitate strengthening of Belarusian products position in Southeast Asia with a perspective of its entry to the ASEAN markets as well.

Cooperation with **Mongolia** noticeably increased in all areas. In July 2015 the Heads of States met at the SCO summit in Ufa. Foreign Ministers held negotiations during the OSCE Ministerial Council in Belgrade. Inter-parliamentary cooperation became more intensive as well.

In May 2015 the State Minister for Foreign Affairs of **Japan** visited our country for the first time. In December 2015 Belarus Foreign Minister met the newly appointed State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan on the sidelines of the OSCE Ministerial Council.

As a result of the purposeful work in 2015 Belarus received observer status in the SCO. Belarus is able to complement the economic cooperation within the SCO using its transit, industrial and scientific potential and is willing to actively participate in coordination of issues related to security in the region.

9. Main efforts in development of cooperation with the countries of **Latin America** were aimed at strengthening dialogue with our key partners, further geographic expansion of bilateral contacts, development of economic ties in promising industries.

The meetings of the Head of State with the Presidents of Venezuela (May), Cuba and Ecuador (September), as well as meetings of joint commissions on trade and economic cooperation with Ecuador, Nicaragua and Argentina, visits of Belarus Foreign Ministry senior officials to El Salvador, Nicaragua and Argentina contributed to the implementation of this strategy. First consultations with the Foreign Ministry of Mexico were held in June 2015 and resulted in agreement to have a first Belarus-Mexican economic forum. Practical cooperation with Chili was established.

To further promote Belarusian products to the Latin American market, Belarus continued opening joint ventures. In particular, an assembly plant of road construction machinery was built in **Venezuela** and thus became the third assembling enterprise with the Belarusian participation in this country.

During the high-level meeting of the Presidents of Belarus and **Brazil** in July 2015 in Ufa establishment of an industrial cluster to produce Belarusian tractors, heavy trucks, dump trucks, agricultural machinery, and joint production of mixed fertilizers in Brazil was discussed.

As a part of the export diversification policy Belarus introduced export crediting mechanisms, including the supply of agricultural machinery and trucks, as well as other measures to support export to **Nicaragua** and **Cuba**.

In 2014 compared to the year 2000 the overall trade of Belarus with the countries of Latin America increased by more than 5 times and the export by more than 8 times, though crisis events in economies of the major trade partners in that region generally affected the dynamics of Belarus export.

10. The visit of the President of the Republic of Belarus to **the UN Summit** in New York became the year’s central event of **the multilateral track**. UN Sustainable Development Agenda adopted for the next 15 years complies with the National Sustainable Development Strategy of the Republic of Belarus till 2030 and corresponds to its national needs.

The conceptual speech delivered from the UN rostrum by the Belarus’ Head of State gave a possibility to focus attention of the international community on fundamental problems of the current crisis phenomena, to present own views on how to achieve real sustainable development, and to emphasize approaches of the Republic of Belarus to the principles of international dialogue taking into account diversity of ways towards progressive development.

On the sidelines of the UN Summit the President met the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and IMF Managing Director.

Belarus continues to promote its initiatives within the UN on combating trafficking and human organs, proposals to the sustainable energy agenda, issues of the middle-income countries and a traditional family.

Youth issues were further promoted of to the UN agenda in the context of the traditional family values with the view that 2015 was declared the Year of Youth in Belarus.

At the 70th UN anniversary Belarus fully committed to the Organization’s principles conducted a number of significant symbolic events. In commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Great Victory, the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko took part in the ceremony of planting a Tree of Peace and Sustainable Development in Loshitsa Park (Minsk). Upon the initiative of the Belarusian side a symbolic ceremony of planting a Tree of Peace and Unity dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Victory over fascism was held at the UN headquarters in New. The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon participated in this ceremony. The launch of a special train “The UN Express in Belarus to support the Sustainable Development Goals” that had travelled through all the regions of our country and became a unique and remarkable project.

During the Russia’s presidency in **BRICS** Belarus initiated a special high-level meeting of the Heads of the EAEU member States as a side event of the 7th BRICS Summit (July). The President of the Republic of Belarus took part in that event.

The Belarusian side actively interacted with other states while preparing for the 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Belarus was elected to the **IAEA** Board of Governors. Four national projects regarding the infrastructure development issues, nuclear power engineering personnel training, use of nuclear technologies in medicine and overcoming the Chernobyl disaster consequences were included into the Agency’s Technical Cooperation Program for 2016-2017.

Minsk became a place for a number of major international forums. In October for the first time Belarus hosted so-called Technical Olympiad – the **79th General Assembly of the International Electrotechnical Commission** (IEC). Heads of the 29 IEC national committees and more than 1200 delegates from leading world companies attended the event.

In April 2015 at the Foreign Ministry’s initiative and jointly with **UNIDO** Minsk hosted a major international conference “Innovative Industrial Development of Middle-Income Countries in Europe and Central Asia”. The forum was attended by the UN Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, representatives of 25 counties and 7 international organizations.

Belarus continued the practice of accession to the important international human rights instruments in order to develop its national policy. In 2015 the President of Belarus signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

During the 38th General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**), which celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2015, Belarus promoted its priorities in all areas of the Organization’s activities, which were included into the UNESCO budget for 2016-2017 adopted at the abovementioned event.

The 250th anniversary of our prominent compatriot Michail Oginski, who was a diplomat, composer, writer and a public figure was included into the UNESCO Memorable Dates Calendar. With this in view France and Belarus held a number of memorial events that attracted attention of the international community.

11. Belarus consistently developed pragmatic cooperation with **the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe** (OSCE) and its institutions.

Following the invitation of Belarus, the missions of the [OSCE](http://context.reverso.net/%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B4/%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B3%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9/the%2BOffice%2Bfor%2BDemocratic%2BInstitutions%2Band%2BHuman%2BRights) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and [OSCE](http://context.reverso.net/%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B4/%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B3%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9/the%2BOffice%2Bfor%2BDemocratic%2BInstitutions%2Band%2BHuman%2BRights) Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) took part in international observation of the Presidential Election in the Republic of Belarus (412 observers in total).

Meaningful visits to Belarus of the following OSCE representatives were organized: OSCE Chairperson-in-Office (July), OSCE Secretary General and ODIHR Director (June), OSCE Special Representative/Coordinatorfor Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (April and July), Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group and Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (March). Belarus Foreign Minister took part in the 22nd OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Belgrade.

Direct cooperation with the OSCE executive bodies on the implementation of joint projects was maintained. A “package” of technical assistance projects for 2015-2016 was agreed on.

In the context of developing constructive dialogue and practical cooperation of Belarus with **the Council of Europe** (CoE) some positive results were achieved with regard to accession to the CoE legal instruments and mechanisms. In particular, Belarus joined the Additional Protocol to the CoE Criminal Law Convention on Corruption.

Belarus took part in two ministerial conferences on culture and sport activities organized under the aegis of the Council of Europe.

The visit to Belarus of the new Rapporteur of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) A.Rigoni (February) and participation of the PACE in observation of the Presidential Election in Belarus established the basis for enhancing the parliamentary dialogue with the Council of Europe.

Belarus continued to actively participate in the activities of sub-regional organizations. The project work with the participation of Belarus within **the Central European Initiative** was expanded, while the organization doubled its financing of the Belarusian projects.

Belarus obtained an observer status in **the Northern Dimension**. The observer status in **the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation** was extended for two years.

Pragmatic cooperation with **the Council of the Baltic Sea States** where Belarus also has the observer status was further developing.

12. In the context of the national security the systematic work on further development of the **Collective Security Treaty Organization** (CSTO) was continued.

Belarus responsibly fulfills its obligations on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, in the field of conventional arms control, export control of specific goods and services, UN Security Council sanctions resolutions implementation.

At the initiative of the Republic of Belarus the 20th Conference of the States – Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) adopted a decision to mark an International Day of the OPCW.

The Foreign Ministry actively supports implementation of the project on anti-personnel mines destruction which continued in the Rechitsa city and funded by the European Commission. The aim of the project is the destruction of more than 3.3 million of anti-personnel mines left in Belarus since the Soviet Union.

Under the Belarus presidency the Third Review Conference on the Implementation of the Treaty on Open Skies was convened in Vienna in June 2015. Despite a number of contentious issues of regional security, all States parties reaffirmed the relevance of the Treaty on Open Skies and their commitments to this legally binding instrument. Contribution of Belarus to preparation and holding of the Conference received general approval of the participating States.

During the visit of the OSCE Secretary General L.Zannier to Belarus in June 2015 a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and the OSCE on the Belarus-OSCE Project on Eliminating of Liquid Rocket Fuel Components Stockpiles was signed. This project presumes the OSCE international technical assistance to Belarus for the utilization of available surplus of the liquid rocket fuel.

Belarusian diplomacy was working on such a new however proved to be important topics: arms race prevention in outer space (in the framework of the negotiations on the International Code of Conduct on Outer Space) and prevention of cyberspace transformation into an interstate confrontation arena.

13. Belarus Foreign Ministry gives a particular importance to the **economic diplomacy** targeting ultimate efficiency of foreign economic efforts. Main attention was paid to coordination of activities under **the** **National Programme to Develop Export** of the Republic of Belarus 2011-2015.

To foster closer cooperation with the exporters, industries and local authorities there were seminars organized on practicalities of operations in Latin America, Gulf countries, Asia and Africa. MFA senior officials regularly met with leading exporters.

Legal and organizational arrangements were under way in order to enable export growth: a number of relevant bylaws were passed.

A lot of attention was paid to intergovernmental commissions on economic cooperation, business cooperation councils and economic conferences, seminars and presentations. There were 33 joint commissions convened in 2015. Relevant networking mechanisms were for the first time test-driven with Argentina, France, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iraqi Kurdistan, and restored with Switzerland, Syria, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Over the last year, the Foreign Ministry was behind 9 national expositions of the Republic of Belarus at the foreign international exhibitions in Germany, Italy, Azerbaijan, South Africa, Cambodia, China, Bulgaria, Russia. Two national fairs were organized in Russia and Turkmenistan.

Belarus showcased its own momentous National Pavilion at **Expo-2015** International Exhibition, a «one day» venue of all regions of our country, a Day of Belarusian Economy, a Day of Belarusian Science and a National Day of the Republic of Belarus. Those in attendance at the National Exposition included nearly 1.7 million.

To make the foreign economic efforts more systemic at governmental level, the Foreign Ministry developed a blueprint of the **National Programme to Encourage and Develop Exports** 2016-2020. Annual joint action plans of the Foreign Ministry, industries and regions will become a tool of the Programme.

Belarus jumped to the 44th standing from No. 57 in the World Bank’s **Doing Business-2016**, and to the 25th place by “International Trade” index.

Measures stepped up to diversify export led to practical results. Amid an overall slump of its volume in 2015, a spectacular growth was reached in exports bound for Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Negotiations on WTO accession was completely reinstated which, if it ends up well, is likely to make Belarus another member of this Organization in the short run.

14. Development of the legal framework led to **138 international treaties and other legal documents signed in 2015**. Currently, the legal framework of the Republic of Belarus comprises 2300 bilateral and 1685 multilateral treaties.

Active work on the development of the EAEU legal system was conducted at a permanent basis, including elaboration and international legal expert evaluation of the draft decisions taken by the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, Eurasian Intergovernmental Council and Eurasian Economic Commission.

Constructive interaction with the UN legal bodies was continued. The Belarusian party participated in the work of the Sixth Committee of the 70th UN General Assembly session, UNCITRAL 48th session and UNCITRAL working parties sessions.

A problem-oriented conference on legal standards and the system of agreements and conventions elaborated within the framework of the European Council as well as the UNCTAD regional seminar “Restructuring of the international investment regime” was held in Minsk with the Foreign Ministry assistance and participation.

The work on the establishment of diplomatic relations is being done on a permanent basis. At present, the Republic of Belarus has diplomatic relations with 174 states or 90% of the total number of the UN member-states (193).

15. Protection of the rights and interests of the legal entities and individuals of the Republic of Belarus abroad, consular assistance to individuals in emergency situations and visa-regime facilitation remained a priority for the Belarusian Foreign Service.

Intergovernmental agreements on visa free regime for diplomatic and service passport holders were signed with Nicaragua, Salvador, Thailand and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Visa free agreements for diplomatic and service passport holders with Cambodia and Singapore as well as visa free agreements with Israel and Ecuador came into force.

Decrees of the President of the Republic of Belarus established a visa free regime for foreigners entering Belarus for a three-day visit of the National Park “Belovezhskaya Pushcha” as well as for the Chinese citizens travelling to the EU countries.

Assisted by Russian and the International Migration Organization 47 Belarusian citizens were evacuated from Yemen, 18 citizens from Syria and 6 citizens from Nepal.

More than 5300 Belarusian laisser-passers were issued to citizens without identification documents.

Miscellaneous legal support was rendered to 3000 citizens of Belarus who applied to diplomatic and consular missions for assistance.

16. Foreign mass media was interested in coverage of Belarus related topics in 2015. Along with important home- and foreign-policy events much attention was also paid to sports, cultural and other kinds of events in our country. By the end of the year the number of journalists accredited at the Foreign Ministry on a permanent basis reached 287 (+37% year to year). 1592 media representatives were accredited on a temporary basis (+22%).