

What's behind Lukashenka's visit to Egypt and Sudan

On 15 January Belarusian president Aliaksandr Lukashenka set off for official visits to Egypt and Sudan, where he conducted negotiations with the leaders of the two countries.

Belarus is trying to broaden its economic relations with developing countries. However, it seems that the main reason behind Egypt and Sudan's growing interest in Belarus lies not in the high quality of Belarusian goods but because other nations do not want to cooperate with them.

More bold declarations

The way Belarusian officials cover the president's visits to African or Asian states follows a predictable pattern. They emphasise the necessity of increasing mutual turnover, particularly in Belarusian export, as well as the importance of new agricultural and industrial projects.

However, unlike Qatar or the UAE, where such lofty goals seem unrealistic, [Egypt is a relative success story](#) for Belarusian policy in the Middle East. Until the beginning of 2016, Egypt was the top Belarusian export destination in the Arab world. Unfortunately, in January – October 2016 these figures dropped significantly. The condition of Belarusian trade with Sudan is similarly pessimistic. The table below illustrates Belarusian export to Egypt and Sudan in 2011-Oct. 2016 (in \$m):



These figures clearly demonstrate that Belarus has managed to find a niche on the Egyptian and Sudanese markets. The Belarusian authorities must now try not to lose it, and expand Belarus's presence in these countries.

A focus on agriculture?

In spite of ambitious declarations by Belarusian state officials, the results of the visits may not end up being very significant. In discussing the economic cooperation between the countries, the Egyptian mass-media was cautious in their estimations. The newspaper *Masr Alarabia* emphasised the weakness of the Belarusian economy, non-developed private business, and the low level of foreign investments coming mainly from Russia.

According to the newspaper, agriculture is one of the main sectors of the Belarusian economy. Thus, the countries should concentrate their efforts on developing cooperation in this sphere.

The newspaper *Al Youm el Sabea* focused on diplomatic declarations, as well as on Mikalai Lukashenka's visit to the Pyramids. Belarusian investments in Egypt remains very low, hovering around \$1.3m. The Egyptian authorities do not expect any significant investments from Belarus.

It seems that Egyptian economists consider Belarus to be a relatively successful agricultural country and would like to use Belarusian experience and capacities to develop Egypt's agricultural sector, particularly, in reclamation of new agricultural lands. Thus, the main point of interest lies in possible supplies of Belarusian agricultural machinery and equipment.

Tractors and agricultural machinery

Due to its ambitious plans to add about 3.4m acres of reclaimed land by 2017, the Egyptian government has tried to

increase imports of agricultural machinery. However, Belarus has never been among the top 10 suppliers of agricultural machinery to Egypt, failing to compete with such countries as the USA, China, Germany, etc.

The following table illustrates the dynamics of Belarusian tractor exports to Egypt in 2011-2016:



The table above points to a lack of any clear trend for Belarusian tractor export to Egypt; over the years, demand has varied significantly. Moreover, the figures show that tractors' share in the overall Belarusian export to Egypt is decreasing. In other words, exports are successfully diversifying.

Why is Belarus becoming more interesting to Egypt?

Thus, the intentions of the Belarusian authorities to strengthen their position on the Egyptian market seem realistic. Egypt already has plants for assembling Belarusian tracks and tractors. In March 2016, the Minsk Automobile Plant opened its representational office in Minsk.

However, the economic situation in Egypt risks becoming a serious obstacle to cooperation. Since 2011, the country has faced a deep economic crisis. With the national currency decreasing by almost 300 per cent, Egypt is suffering from a lack of foreign currency and can hardly pay for already signed contracts.

In this context, the Egyptian authorities are trying to find more loyal and patient partners. Belarus risks facing problems either with payments or with profitability of its supplies. For example, the average price for a Belarusian tractors

shipped to Egypt in 2016 was 20 per cent (\$12,103) less than the average price for other consumers (\$15,080).

The second point of interest concerns Belarus's participation in Eurasian integration and access to the attractive markets of Russia and Kazakhstan. However, the Egyptian government enjoys sustainable relations with Russia and it seems unclear to what extent Belarus can develop its cooperation with Egypt in this sphere.

Relations with Sudan: a second revival?

The situation with Sudan is similar to the one with Egypt. The following table illustrates the dynamics of Belarusian tractor exports to Sudan in 2011-2016:



Belarus started to have very intensive relations with Sudan in the early 2000s, and in 2004, Sudanese leader Omar al-Bashir visited Belarus. Due to the internal conflict in Sudan, the parties paid special attention to military and technical cooperation, including supplies of military goods. However, the scale of cooperation has never been stable.

The easing of international sanctions on trade with Sudan in January 2017 forced the Belarusian authorities to intensify their efforts to expand Belarusian export to the country. Belarus has already proposed its services in the spheres of oil-field exploration and exploitation. Not surprisingly, the Joint Sudan-Belarus Ministerial Committee is headed by the Sudanese minister of petroleum and gas, Muhammad Awwadh.

Joint manufacturing of vehicles and machinery production also seem to be in the offing. Previously established contacts, as well as a Sudan-Belarus business forum organised during the

visit, will help to promote cooperation.

New opportunities?

Belarus faces a [serious economic crisis](#). The amount and value of its [exports is falling](#) and the country is looking for new markets, or at least intends to expand existing ones. In this context, countries such as Egypt or Sudan, where Belarus enjoys a relatively sustainable position, look to be promising partners.

Belarus is proposing a traditional set of goods (focusing on agricultural machinery and to a lesser extent on agricultural products) and services, including oil prospecting. The main problem, however, lies in the following question: why have these countries become more interested in Belarus now? Both Egypt and Sudan suffer from economic crises. Few countries consider them reliable partners.

The Belarusian authorities should make efforts to guarantee the implementation of signed agreements and expand the scale of cooperation. Dealing with economically weak countries involves many risks. Belarus has already suffered from this in the past, when Mozambique and Zimbabwe defaulted on payments. The country should be careful with supplies without 100 per cent payment in advance.

Lukashenka appoints a top communist as the new Minister

of Education

On 15 December President Aliaksandr Lukashenka appointed vice-mayor of Minsk Ihar Karpenka as Minister of Education. However, two important facts about the latter have caused serious discussion within the Belarusian expert community.

First, at the moment of his appointment, Ihar Karpenka was the Head of the Communist Party in Belarus. Second, the dismissal of the previous Minister, Dr. Mikhail Zhuraukou, contained an element of disgrace: he was sacked during his annual leave while he was outside the country. Moreover, after his dismissal, Zhuraukou was demoted and is now simply a head of department at the Belarusian State University.

These circumstances raise questions regarding the fate of Zhuraukou's legacy, the most important aspect of which was Belarus's participation in the Bologna Process.

Belarus's *Via Dolorosa* and the Bologna process

Belarus joined the Bologna process in May 2015 as part of a phase of [soft political liberalisation](#) and rapprochement with the West. However, because the country's educational system has remained far below the standards set by the Bologna Process, Belarus has committed to [implementing a road map of reforms by 2018](#).

However, many experts have pointed out that the real intentions of the Belarusian authorities go far beyond the goals and principles of the Bologna Process. For example, [Vadzim Mažejka](#) has expressed the opinion that in committing to the Roadmap, Belarus aimed to lower the duration of study in order to reduce public spending on education.

Promoting diplomas from Belarusian institutions among foreign students as 'internationally recognised' would also help reduce public expenditure: [fees paid by foreign students](#) constitute a significant share of the incomes of Belarusian universities, sometimes exceeding 50 per cent of their budgets.

Imitation of a pro-reformist dialogue with the West has also contributed to the Belarusian authorities' considerations.

Predicted difficulties

On 13 December 2016 the Ostrogorski Centre co-organised the 4th Annual Dutch-Belarusian-Polish Conference '[Education as a Human Right: Modernising Higher Education to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century](#)'. During the conference, two prominent speakers representing state and non-state positions on education, Dr. Ihar Tsitovich (a vice-rector of the Republican Institute of Higher Education) and Dr. Uladzimir Dunaev (a member of the Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee), discussed achievements and difficulties in implementing the roadmap.

The two experts revealed the fundamental contradictions between the Belarusian authorities and independent analysts in their approaches to the Bologna Process. The authorities highlight primarily technical steps, such as introducing Diploma Supplements, developing modules and the credits system, and introducing changes in curricula.

Meanwhile, independent experts point to more fundamental principles such as academic freedom, mobility, close cooperation between the business and educational sectors, international cooperation, education based on students' needs, co-existence between formal, informal, and non-formal education, etc. According to the Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee, in 2015-2016 Belarus implemented only nine

per cent of the roadmap. In many spheres, progress has been negligible.

Dubious value

While the fundamental contradictions between the intentions of the Belarusian authorities and the essence of the Bologna Process have become increasingly apparent, its value for the government appears dubious.

During the two years since Belarus joined the Bologna Process, growth in the number of foreign students has remained insignificant: less than 1,000 people, or about seven per cent. Moreover, the number of students from Turkmenistan and China – the largest consumers of Belarusian educational services – has decreased: from 801 to 759 students (China) and from 8,342 to 7,911 students (Turkmenistan).

One major problem lies in the values of the Bologna Process and academic freedoms. A test of the authorities' limits occurred in November-December 2015. A group of students at the Belarusian State University [took a stand against the University's plan](#) to introduce fees for re-sitting examinations. In spite of the insignificance of the case and the wide range of opportunities for dialogue, the authorities nevertheless chose to rely on repression. The rector of the University even refused to meet with the protesting students.

Moreover, in January-February 2016 the Ministry of Education made an attempt to replace the deans of the most 'oppositional' faculties, but succeeded in replacing only the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy.

A second problem occurred during the [Parliamentary elections in September 2016](#). In Belarus, no one can claim to really know the results of elections. However, some facts point to the growth of protest voting among students. For example, one

opposition candidate and professor at the university, Aleh Trusau, claims to have counted the votes of his students. His figures significantly contradicted the official results.

It seems that Mikhail Zhuraukou's inability to prevent dissent among students and the poor results of Belarus's participation in the Bologna Process contributed to his dismissal significantly.

What tasks does the new minister face?

During the appointment of Karpenka, Aliaksandr Lukashenka made a clear statement on his vision for the new minister's work. According to the president, Karpenka is well acquainted with the ideological pillars of the state. The Communist Party enjoys great support from the authorities, who claim that communist ideology remains relevant for Belarus. In November 2016, the government of Minsk unveiled a new monument to Lenin together with the Communist Party in Minsk.

Karpenka's biography also raises questions. The new minister of education lacks experience in this sphere. In 2003-2004 he served as vice-rector at the Belarusian State Pedagogical University. He supervised ideological work and social issues, while activities related to education were not part of his responsibilities. In 2004 Karpenka started his public administration career (as a member of Parliament and then as vice-mayor of Minsk) and returned to the sphere of education only in 2016.

Kaprenka is one of a number of critics of Belarus's participation in the Bologna Process. He praises the Soviet educational system, the important role of ideology and forced labour in education, as well as obligatory work placements after graduating. Independent experts, such as Uladzimir

Dunaev, consider Karpenka's appointment 'a step back' for education in Belarus.

However, the most important point concerns the authorities' general attitude towards the Bologna process. In addition to disappointing results, the government has started to feel insecure about the amount of freedom, or even simply hints of freedom, in the academic sphere. The students protests are a clear example of this. It seems that the authorities would prefer stability over uncertain future economic benefits and a chance of protest.

Thus, it seems that the main tasks for the new minister are to increase control, strength ideology, and prevent the Bologna Process from resulting in any serious transformation.

Belarus in the Arab World: a one family business?

On 20 September 2016 Minsk hosted the first Oman-Belarus invest forum. More than 40 Omani businessmen held negotiations with over 70 representatives of various Belarusian companies.

The day before the forum, the Omani delegation met with Aliaksandr Lukashenka, who urged the Omani businessmen to invest more in Belarus.

While the Middle Eastern vector of Belarusian foreign policy plays an important role in public declarations, actual trade and business has yet to follow.

Grand plans rather than roadmapping

In August 2016 the Belarusian government adopted a new strategy for export development in 2016-2020. According to this plan, one third of Belarusian exports would go to the Eurasian Union, one third to the EU, and one third to so-called “far arc” countries.

As [is often the case with Belarusian state programmes](#), such ambitious plans are rarely supported by practical follow-through. Statistics illustrate opposing trends in the development of Belarusian exports: Belarus is failing to retain its share of all markets outside Russia. Low quality, high prices on manufactured goods, excessive bureaucracy, and degradation of technology all prevent Belarus from finding new prospective markets abroad.

No place for Belarusian goods in Arab countries?

Despite pretentious declarations about the importance of Arab countries for the Belarusian economy, the actual figures do not support these claims. In January-July 2016 the total turnover between Belarus and the region amounted to around \$120m, i.e. less than five per cent of the total turnover.

The following table illustrates Belarusian export (in \$m) to Arab countries:



Over the past five years the value of Belarusian exports to the region has remained fairly static: about \$250-300m. On one hand this can be seen as a success, given that the total value

of Belarusian export has fallen by 35 per cent since 2011.

On the other hand, this also shows the unstable character of Belarusian trade with Arab countries: export and import can fluctuate by 1000-1500 per cent. This is caused by signing one-time contracts without a permanent presence on these markets.

Contrary to widespread belief, Belarus has failed to attain a positive trade balance with all Arab countries. In January-July 2016 Belarus had a negative trade balance with Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Somalia with a roughly \$66.5m trade deficit. Moreover, in 2011-2016 Belarus actually lost the Algerian and Lebanese markets. The table below illustrates these trends:



The variety of Belarusian goods exported to Arab countries also remains very limited. Official documents mention powdered milk, tyres, different kinds of steel, tractors and machinery. Egypt and Jordan are among the most important consumers of these goods, but even here the volumes and amounts of these exports is comparatively low.

Numerous reports indicate that Belarus has become a successful supplier of weapons to several Arab countries, including Iraq, Syria and Sudan, while nevertheless managing to avoid any serious involvement in regional conflicts.

Personal relations over public interests

Many experts emphasise the importance of personal ties in this process. Belarus has become sadly notorious for its close relations with Iraq during the presidency of Hussein, with Gaddafi's Libya, with the Sudanese leader al-Bashir, and the

Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

Such relations can be seen as a form of mutual support between authoritarian and anti-Western leaders. However, Lukashenka and his family also maintain good personal relations with the Gulf monarchies, particularly with the ruling families in Qatar and the UAE. Belarusian researcher Siarhei Bohdan considers that [Belarus's relations with the Gulf States](#) are the main vector in Belarusian foreign policy in the Middle East.

The economic benefits for Belarus of such friendship are dubious, and moreover are a source of much gossip about the nontransparent nature of cooperation, especially in the finance and security sectors.

Some experts believe that Lukashenka's family's hidden billions are stored in Gulf banks. The personal devotion of the president's eldest son – Viktor Lukashenka – to the Formula 1 races in Abu Dhabi is no secret in the region.

Belarus actively participates in training Qatar's and the UAE's [security forces, as well as in presenting its weapons at military exhibitions](#) in the Gulf. [Russian political commentator Evgeny Satanovski has accused Belarus](#) of working against Russia's interests in the Middle East. According to him, Qatar and the UAE purchase arms for ISIS largely from Belarus.

The Gulf States are among the largest investors in Belarus from the Middle East. However, they invest mainly in lands and resorts, while the financial details of these operations remain unknown.

The Omani case

The Omani case serves as an example of the unstable and personally motivated character of Belarusian foreign policy in

the region. Actual relations broke off in 2007 after Lukashenka's visit to Muscat. Trade turnover amounted to \$7m, with several Omani businessmen working in Russia becoming a driving force for this cooperation. In the following years the trade turnover fell to \$1m and all contacts practically ceased.

Belarusian state companies complain about low demand for Belarusian products in Oman. However, the Belarusian company *Sohra Group* has become a successful seller of Belarusian machinery in Oman and in the Gulf countries in general. The actual scheme according to which business has been unprofitable for state companies but profitable for one private company remains murky.

In 2010-2012 Omani businessmen tried to purchase a large plot of land in the centre of Minsk for the ridiculously low price of \$10m but could not reach a final agreement. Even the price itself led to suspicions about the non-business nature of such investments.

Uncertainty and mysteries

Belarus has failed to establish efficient and sustainable economic relations with the Arab countries. Instead of transparent and profitable business, the Belarusian authorities prefer personally grounded backroom dealings with their counterparts in the Arab world.

At certain points in time, Belarus has vigorously sought closer ties with anti-Western Arab regimes but thoroughly avoids any real engagement in regional conflicts.

Nontransparent business schemes and security cooperation with pro-Western Gulf States seem to be the current preference of the Belarusian foreign policy in the Middle East. Its public economic component becomes less significant.

Belarusian parliamentary elections: does everybody win?

On 11 September 2016 Belarus [held elections](#) to the House of Representatives of the National Assembly. In spite of the relatively insignificant role of the parliament in the Belarusian political system, these elections seem particularly important given the international situation and current economic crisis in Belarus.

Many experts expected deeper democratisation during the electoral campaign, such as introducing the OSCE's recommendations into legislation, as well as including several representatives from the opposition into the parliament. According to experts' views, such steps would demonstrate the authorities' willingness to continue their dialogue with the West and would guarantee further loans from the IMF.

However, the actual results appeared to be much more moderate than experts had expected.

Authorities Sing the Same Old Song

One needs to be a very attentive analyst in order to find any significant difference between the current elections and previous electoral campaigns. The authorities have certainly introduced a few of minor changes into the legislation to demonstrate their willingness to cooperate with the OSCE and

the West in general. Simultaneously, they have launched an information campaign to demonstrate their inability at a constitutional level to implement the OSCE's main recommendations.

As a result, all the flaws of the Belarusian electoral system, such as [abuses during early voting](#), strong administrative support for certain candidates, and a lack of control during votes counting have remained untouched.

96% of the candidates from 'Nasha Niva's list became MPs

Naturally, both international and domestic independent observers have called the results of the elections into question. Two month ago 'Nasha Niva', an opposition newspaper, published a forecast of the future members of parliament. The journalists based their assumption not on the candidates' programmes or on sociological surveys but on the candidates' relations with the authorities. As a result, 96% of the candidates from 'Nasha Niva's list became MPs.

Many experts consider early voting to be one of the main indicators of fraud during electoral campaigns in Belarus. The 2016 campaign has not been an exception – according to official data, early voting amounted for 31,29% of votes compared to 26% during the previous parliamentary elections in 2012 and to 36,05% during the presidential elections in 2015.

Since in 2006 early voting amounted to 31,3% of the vote, one would need to be quite an optimist to find any liberalisation in this practise during the current parliament elections. Only wide use of administrative resources could guarantee such high results.

When the Results Become More Interesting than the Process

Nevertheless, there has been one surprise during these elections. Two apparently non-establishment candidates won a place in the parliament – a member of the oppositional United Civil Party (UCP), Hanna Kanapatskaya, and Aliona Anisim, a deputy head of the Belarusian Language Society. In this context, Dr. Andrey Kazakievich, one of the leading researchers of Belarusian elections, has stated that for the first time since 2000 the results of the current elections appear to be more interesting than the campaign itself.

□Some experts consider the two non-governmental MPs to be a sensational result of these elections

Some experts consider the two non-governmental MPs to [be a sensational result](#) of these elections and speculate on the possible changes in the parliament's future activities. Anyone acquainted with Aliaksandr Lukashenka's personal attitude to the very idea of non pro-governmental MPs understands the importance of this result.

During the previous electoral campaign numerous high-level officials in Belarus, including secretary of the Central Commission on Elections Mikalai Lazavik, made statements about the possibility of a few opposition MPs in the parliament. Such non-public discussion continued in the Presidential Administration.

Those officials and agencies, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who supported this idea, pointed out the inability of such a small group (up to 10 MPs) to have any influence on the decision-making process. At the same time, their mere presence in the parliament would send positive signals to the West. However, the president rejected all such

proposals.

Games with the West

One can doubt whether these two MPs are even truly members of the opposition as such. Aliona Anisim has publicly rejected the "opposition" label. Her activities promoting the Belarusian language correspond to the authorities' latest trend of [soft belarusization](#).

Moreover, her presence could help Lukashenka in his negotiations with Moscow – the weak economic situation strengthens nationalistic forces, which could be potentially dangerous for Russia. The head of the Belarusian Language Society – the very well-known member of the opposition Aleh Trusau – was not elected.

The situation with Hanna Kanapatskaya is even more ambiguous. Her victory could force the UCP to recognise the results of the elections, which would mean internal legitimisation of Lukashenka's parliament. This makes conflicts inside the UCP, as well as among other opposition organisations, even more possible.

two MPs can do almost nothing within the strictly authoritarian Belarusian political system

Despite the expectations of certain experts, two MPs can do almost nothing within the strictly authoritarian Belarusian political system. Moreover, serious doubts exist about Kanapatskaya's and Anisim's intent to truly represent the opposition in parliament, let alone disturb the authorities with non-approved initiatives.

Almost no one doubts that the [West remains the main audience](#) for these elections' results. The OSCE, EU, and USA have already expressed doubts regarding the fairness of the

Belarusian elections and have called for further reforms of electoral legislation. The artificial character of the campaign, as well as copious fraud remain an open secret. However, given the continuing conflict with Russia and the balancing position of Belarus nobody wants to antagonise Lukashenka.

Rumours exist that such 'liberalisation' should become a precondition for a new loan from the IMF, as well as to improve relations with the EU and particularly the USA. However, even if these rumours have nothing in common with the reality, the authorities lose nothing.

Does Everybody Win?

Thus, it seems that everybody wins as a result of these elections. The president maintains a completely loyal parliament which has no actual influence on the decision-making process in the country.

The West achieves 'apparent' steps towards democratisation and liberalisation in Belarus. The opposition had its 'minute of glory' and once again demonstrated to everybody, including foreign partners, its inability to propose any serious political alternative. The intensive cleansing of the political field in the country since 2010 has born fruit for the authorities.

Thus, in terms of economic and social development of the country, the new Belarusian parliament is shaping up to become as efficient as the previous one, which initiated only three laws during its four year term. Its main function this time around will be reintegrating and legitimising the current Belarusian government to the world.

Why Belarus Fails to Attract Foreign Tourists

In April 2016 the NGO Priceconomics published an article entitled Which Countries Are the Most / Least Overrun by Tourists? in which Belarus was ranked the 11th least popular country for tourists.

The fact that a central European country is as appealing to tourists as Niger, Chad, or Sudan has already caused much discussion in Belarus.

Two facts add fuel to these discussions. First of all, Belarus attracted an unexpectedly low amount of tourists during the [2014](#) World Hokey Championship. Only 137,400 organised tourists visited Belarus in 2014 (0,5% growth compared to 2013). Unfortunately, due to a change in methodology for the year 2015, the National Statistics Committee has not published reliable data.

Secondly, in 2015 Belarus completed the state tourism development programme for 2011-2015. BYR 4299 bn were allocated for only a portion of the Tourism development programme's implementation. Given the large amount of money invested, one could expect either better results or a deep analysis of the failure.

Strange plans and statistical

games

Unfortunately, before its implementation the programme performed only a fragmented analysis of the tourism sphere. Moreover, the authorities have provided no reports on the programme's success.

However, the parts of the programme for which we do have concrete figures demonstrate its dramatic failure. The table below illustrates this idea:



The officially quoted number of organised tourists serves as a perfect example of statistical 'games' in Belarus. In 2010-2014 the authorities provided this figure without counting separate excursions within the country as additional tourists. However, when the time came to file a report, the authorities had included excursions in this number: in other words, a tourist arriving in Minsk who was later re-registered in Brest or Hrodna because of an excursion could be counted up to three times. Thus, they claimed 276,260 foreign tourists but counted many of them at least twice.

Unfortunately for the Belarusian authorities, the number of trips made by foreign citizens to Belarus reveals the actual situation. In 2010 this number amounted to 5,673,800 trips, while in 2015 it fell to 4,357,200 trips (by 23,2%).

The number of tourists '*served by organisations which provide services for tourists*' in 2010-2014 strangely corresponds to the number of organised tourists. However, in 2015 the statistical authorities named only 101,686 tourists. One can consider this figure as more or less accurate and far less than the planned 190,000 tourists.

Vague descriptions instead of exact figures

Unfortunately for experts, the programme primarily contains descriptive goals and indicators. Vague expressions such as 'to examine the possibility, to raise the level' or 'to conduct discussions on the issue' dominate in the programmes' activities and / or expected results. Much time is devoted to studying the "international experience."

The existing figures seem rather dubious and poorly grounded. The predominance of round numbers, the absence of correlations, as well as the overly linear rate of growth regardless of time period support these doubts. The programme provides neither explanation nor calculations for these figures.

In some situations even their economic value remains ambiguous. Authorities allocated BYR 4299 bn for only part of the programme's implementation. At the same time, the planned total revenue from export was to amount to BYR 4365 bn.□

The correlation between figures also raises questions. One can hardly expect that growth in foreign tourists' visits by 163% would increase the export of touristic services by 348%. However, neither the programme, nor the scarce information on its accomplishment, nor real results suggest any explanations for these figures.

Moreover, the programme, designed as a five-year plan, fails to stipulate any serious inner mechanism of policy correlation which would take into account the unstable economic situation in Belarus. Most of its planned results (such as 'development of the tourism market') are practically unverifiable and leave a lot of room for embezzlement.

No real analysis or participation of interested parties

The programme almost completely excluded any participation from interested public parties. State agencies acted as the programme's ordering parties, designers, performers and even consumers.

While many experts point to the complicated [visa regime](#), the inexplicable [system of registration](#) of foreign visitors with the immigration police and the general unfriendly environment, the programme's designers failed to co-operate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Border Guard Committee. Private companies certainly have had no say in the programme.

Poor service remains one of the main sources of complaints in the tourism sphere in Belarus. However, the programme almost completely failed to consider this aspect at all and provides no recommendations for improvement.

The system of monitoring and control also remains strikingly undeveloped. The programme really stipulates only one form of monitoring and control – annual reports to the Ministry of Sports and Tourism and a following report to the Council of Ministers. Naturally, such self-reporting results in poor implementation and provokes numerous rumours about the corrupt nature of state programmes.

What is the future?

The programme excludes any clear and reasonable criteria for its execution or effectiveness. Given the economic and

political situation in Belarus, any medium-term planning appears impossible. The prevailing 'manual' methods of administration preclude setting strategic goals, developing long-term policies, or achieving predicted and grounded results.

The apparent lack of public inclusiveness, transparency, and control suggest the programme's real function is to act as an instrument of redistributing public funds among elite groups rather than developing the country's tourism industry.

The statistical data confirm the simple truth: the development of tourism in Belarus requires comprehensive and fundamental changes, as well as mutual cooperation between business and the state. Otherwise, Belarus risks staying at the level of Niger, Sudan, Chad, Guinea etc. not only when it comes to appeal to tourists but in other spheres as well.