

Europe Insists on Human Rights Progress, Nuclear Plant Concerns – Belarus Foreign Policy Digest

In the first half of November, senior Belarusian diplomats met with their counterparts from Lithuania and France. The meetings focused on economic cooperation. However, Europe has insisted on the need for further progress in the fields of human rights and democracy in Belarus.

Trade, industrial cooperation and investments dominated the agenda of Belarusian Prime Minister Andrei Kobyakov's visit to Pakistan and Turkey, this time without a human rights' "aftertaste". Falling export revenues have led to greater personal involvement by the head of government in advancing Belarus's economic interests abroad.

Vilnius Wants Transparency on Astraviec NPP

The [suspension of EU sanctions](#) has had no visible effect on the dialogue between Minsk and Vilnius, which continued during the most difficult moments of relations between Belarus and Europe.

On 9–10 November, the bilateral commission on trade and economic cooperation convened in Minsk for its 17th meeting. The delegations led by the economy ministers of the two countries, discussed cooperation in transport, transit, energy, protection of the environment, industry, agriculture

and tourism.



On 12 November, Belarusian foreign minister [Vladimir Makei](#) received his Lithuanian counterpart Linas Linkevičius. The agenda of their meeting, in addition to the issues discussed by the bilateral commission, included [border infrastructure](#)

and the relations between Belarus and the European Union.

In a Twitter message after the meeting with Makei, the Lithuanian minister called their talks “candid” and named three areas where irreversible progress was needed: human rights, a [visa facilitation agreement](#) and cooperation with the EU. He also underscored the need for transparency on Astraviec NPP.

In fact, the issue of the [nuclear facility](#), which Belarus is building 50 km from Vilnius, may have been the most difficult one at the last talks. Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius told journalists last week that Belarus failed to follow certain international agreements, which provide for an independent environmental assessment of the construction’s impact on neighbouring countries.

Algirdas Butkevičius also strongly denied reports published by Russian media, claiming that Lithuania and Belarus had agreed on the construction of Astraviec NPP. He stressed that “Lithuania [was] not going to adapt any infrastructure to that power plant and [was] not going to buy electricity from Astraviec NPP”.

In Minsk, Belarus and Lithuania agreed to hold an expert meeting in December to discuss Vilnius’ concerns.

Despite a fruitful dialogue on economic and political issues, Belarus and Lithuania do not forget that they belong to two opposing military blocs. On 5 November, Vilnius county court found a former employee of state enterprise Oro Navigacija

(Air Navigation) Romualdas Lipskis guilty of spying for Belarus.

This has been the first espionage case that reached the court after the restoration of Lithuania's independence. Romualdas Lipskis was sentenced to three years and three months in a correction facility for having collected information about Lithuanian military and civil facilities.

Kobyakov Visits Pakistan and Turkey

Prime Minister [Andrei Kobyakov](#) has become actively involved in the country's diplomatic efforts lately aimed at opening new markets for Belarusian goods.

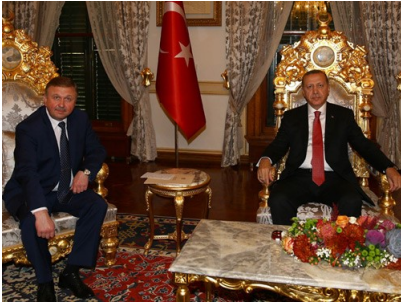
On 9-11 November, Andrei Kobyakov led a high-powered Belarusian delegation to Pakistan. In Islamabad, he met with his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif and spoke at the third Pakistan-Belarus Business and Investment Forum.



The Belarusian prime minister called the existing trade turnover between the two countries (\$60 million in 2014) a “statistical margin of error”. He nurtures the ambition of blowing it up to \$1 billion dollars in a mid-term perspective. To achieve this target, the parties signed a programme titled “Roadmap for fast-track and middle-track economic cooperation between Pakistan and Belarus”.

Pakistani media announced the signing of 18 bilateral documents (agreements, memoranda of understanding, protocols and programmes) while Kobyakov's press service speaks of 17 documents. Belarus and Pakistan will focus on industrial cooperation, and agriculture and infrastructure development.

Kobyakov's press service has also [avoided mentioning military cooperation](#) among the topics for discussion, probably not willing to harm Belarus' relations with India. Meanwhile, the Pakistani press have reported on the discussion of cooperation in defence and defence production, counter-terrorism and narcotics control.



From Islamabad, Andrei Kobyakov flew directly to Istanbul. There, on 12 November, he spoke at the Belarusian Investment Forum. The prime minister announced Belarus' new export market diversification strategy and called [Turkey](#) “a key place, a new springboard” for

Belarus.

Andrei Kobyakov met in Istanbul with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan and several potential investors. In a similar way to Belarus's cooperation with Pakistan, Minsk places great hopes on setting up local assembly of traditional Belarusian goods, such as tractors, automobiles, road-building and mining machinery, as well as refrigerators with Turkey. In its trade with Turkey, Belarus also wants to achieve the “intermediate” target of \$1 billion in turnover by 2016. The current figure stands at about \$600 million.

Kupchyna in Paris for UNESCO and Bilateral Talks

Deputy foreign minister [Alena Kupchyna](#) visited Paris on 5 – 6 November to speak on behalf of the delegation of Belarus at the 38th session of the General Conference of UNESCO. She also met with the organisation's Director-General Irina Bokova.

Kupchyna's statement in the general debate has been a good sample of a ritual intervention enumerating 'achievements' and 'priorities' in [Belarus' relations with UNESCO](#). Recently, Belarus and UNESCO have not implemented any high-profile cooperation projects.



No new [sites from Belarus](#) have been inscribed on the World Heritage List since 2005. Besides, there have been no new additions to the tentative list since 2004.

In previous years, lower-level officials represented Belarus at the sessions of UNESCO's General Conference. It may well be that the main reason for Kupchyna's visit to Paris was to meet with senior French officials.



Indeed, on 6 November, Alena Kupchyna met with Harlem Désir, Minister of State for European Affairs. The French diplomat, who has maintained regular contact with his Belarusian counterpart, became the first to [break the news](#) about the forthcoming suspension of EU sanctions against Belarus.

The press services of both foreign ministries reported about France's appreciation of the constructive role Belarus had played in helping to find a lasting solution to the Ukrainian crisis as well as the discussion of the development of bilateral economic relations.

However, the Belarusian foreign ministry "forgot" to mention Harlem Désir's call for Belarus' efforts with respect to human rights and democratic principles. The Belarusian regime can hardly expect that France and other EU countries will satisfy themselves with the expansion of bilateral trade and Belarus' "donorship of stability".

Belarus Discovers Its Eurasian Side

In July, Belarus launched a diplomatic offensive to build ties with regional superpowers like China, India and Brazil seeking to counterbalance the much-publicised overtures its has been making to the West.

The BRICS summit in Ufa, Russia, provided Lukashenka with a good opportunity to meet many leaders of the developing world.

Belarus also succeeded in upgrading its status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, but will Belarus reinvigorate its cooperation with this Asian organisation by using its privileges of an observer?

BRICS and Belarus

On 9 July in Ufa, [Alexander Lukashenka](#) attended the traditional meeting of the BRICS leaders with the heads of states that are geographically and geopolitically close to the summit's chairing nation – which this time was Russia. He also met with the presidents of Afghanistan, Brazil, Iran, Mongolia and Russia.

The Belarusian leader rejoiced at the fact that "the BRICS countries do not tie cooperation and mutual assistance to any additional conditions". Indeed, gatherings like those of BRICS or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation – a group that includes Russia, China and several Central and South Asian nations – have based their cooperation on a number of other issues they have in common, while sidestepping issues of rule of law, human rights or democracy.

Belarus has modest trade relations with most BRICS nations

In Ufa, Lukashenka designated the members of BRICS "powerhouses" of economic development, which are "helping other countries to ensure their post-crisis recovery". However, most of them are far from being in perfect economic shape themselves as of late, as Russia and Brazil are both enduring a recession, and China and South Africa's economies have both slowed down.

The share of Belarus' trade with BRICS, excluding Russia, remains below a meager seven per cent of its total turnover. For example, trade with India – a South Asian giant – stands at \$400m, while the turnover with the second-largest African economy – South Africa – is almost non-existent.

The government hopes that visits by the [Chinese](#) president Xi Jinping (10 – 12 May) and [Indian](#) president Pranab Mukherjee (3 – 4 July) to Minsk as well as Lukashenka's meeting with Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff in Ufa will give the much needed impetus to improve bilateral trade with BRICS members.

These bilateral efforts may indeed bring some results. However, it is doubtful that Lukashenka's pet idea of the "[integration of integrations](#)" as applied to cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union and BRICS will advance beyond a catchy political slogan.

Who Stands to Gain?

Lately, the Russian public and its politicians have become concerned with Belarus' alleged "re-orientation" towards the West. Frequent meetings between Belarusian and European officials and Minsk's persistent engagement with the [Eastern partnership](#), a project that Russian first deputy prime minister Igor Shuvalov labelled a "grave mistake", creates the impression with many in Moscow that Belarus may be taking the Ukrainian path.

Lukashenka even had to reassure Putin in Ufa, "we are now in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and they will stop reproaching us that we are only looking towards the West". Minsk is avoiding alienating Russia at all costs as the presidential election approaches. Belarus needs Russian loans to support the ailing economy at this critical moment.

Beyond this, Lukashenka's government sincerely believes that Belarus' active participation in multilateral forums and the president's personal contacts with leaders of third-world countries may help significantly increase the country's exports to new markets.

For its part, Moscow sees Belarus' greater engagement in any Eurasian integration project as a means to lead it further away from the West. Minsk seems to be willing to play along while seeking both immediate and long-term economic benefits.

Is Belarus a Eurasian Country?

From Ufa, the Belarusian delegation returned with a long-sought prize – it received observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. This Asian organisation, founded in 2001, currently includes Russia, China, four post-Soviet Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and, beginning this year, India and Pakistan.

A few days before the organisation's summit in Ufa, Belarus remained pessimistic about the possible outcome of its aspirations to become an observer. Speaking to the Russian news agency TASS on 6 July, deputy foreign minister [Valentin Rybakov](#) said that while most of the group's members supported Belarus in its application, Uzbekistan (for a non-disclosed reason) opposed it.

Back in 2006, even Russia doubted the validity of Belarus' claim to receive any status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Sergei Ivanov, Putin's close friend and Russia's

deputy prime minister at that time, said, "[Belarus] is not an Asian country, in contrast to Russia, which is a Eurasian state". Finally, however, Belarus succeeded in proving him wrong and is reinventing itself with a decidedly Eurasian dimension to its image.

In 2010, Belarus received a lesser status as the organisation's "dialogue partner". In this capacity, it managed to attend many working-level events that are focused on the fight against arms and drug trafficking, terrorism, illegal migration, transports and culture.

On 8 July, Russia's president Vladimir Putin made the surprise announcement that Belarus would be elevated to observer status as the member countries had been able to come to an agreement on this issue.

Belarus offsets its open border with Russia by improving its multilateral cooperation with Asian countries

The Belarusian foreign ministry, welcoming this decision in a special statement, stressed that Belarus as a country, which has an open border with Russia, remained "exposed to the same threats and effects as other SCO countries".

Indeed, a large share of illegal drugs, arms and migrants are making their way to Belarus via Russia from the organisation's other members. Illogically, instead of securing its border against such threats, Belarus hopes to overcome them by obtaining observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

In his interview with a domestic TV channel that aired on 12 July, Belarus' foreign minister [Vladimir Makei](#) claimed that Belarus remained "interested in projects in the areas of energy, agriculture, transportation, communications, telecommunications as well as some other projects". However, economic cooperation is not a priority for the organisation,

as security cooperation dominates its agenda.

Belarus enjoys a well-established tradition of cooperation with all members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation on a bilateral basis. Its newly gained observer status has little chance of providing any real added value to such cooperation. It looks more like a tool used to sustain the thesis of the multi-vector standard of Belarusian foreign policy and even a means by which Lukashenka can meet with Asian leaders more often.

Intensive Dialogue with Europe, South Asian and African Overtures – Belarus Foreign Policy Digest

Belarus has been making a desperate attempt to introduce its goods to new markets, hoping to compensate for declining exports to many of their traditional destinations, especially Russia.

Over the past few weeks, Belarusian diplomats have concentrated their trade promotion efforts on Asian, African and MENA countries. However, in most of these cases prospects for a major breakthroughs are rather grim with few serious projects to back up their diplomatic activities.

Belarus' European agenda continues to be heavily loaded with meetings and consultations at the highest working level. In June, the agenda's emphasis shifted to consultations between Belarus and several European institutions, focusing mainly on

preparations for the forthcoming presidential election in Belarus and engagement on potential post-election cooperation.

Intensive Dialogue with European Institutions

Over recent weeks, Minsk became a pilgrimage destination for emissaries from many European institutions. On 8 June, deputy foreign minister [Alena Kupchyna](#) met with members of the Working Party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia of the EU Council (COEST). On 18 June, she received a delegation from the European parliament and on 1 July, the Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

On 15 and 16 June, Alexander Lukashenka and his foreign minister Vladimir Makei met with two high-ranking OSCE officials, Secretary General Lamberto Zannier and Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Michael Link.

Belarus shrugged off a CEI foreign ministers' meetings in order to host OSCE officials

While Belarusian officials claimed that a wide range of issues were discussed at these meetings, they all clearly had one issue in mind, the forthcoming presidential election in Belarus and the role of European institutions in monitoring said election. Alexander Lukashenka, confident in the results of this October 'exercise' and reassured by Europe's more congenial attitude towards Belarus, has regularly invited international organisations to send their observers to Belarus.

Belarusian officials meetings with their OSCE counterparts were so important for Belarusian diplomats that they virtually disregarded a meeting of the Central European Initiative foreign ministers in Macedonia on 15 June, sending only the

Belarusian ambassador to Serbia.

Belarus is relentless in pushing through the idea of the 'integration of integrations'

Recently, Minsk hosted another European event, not directly related to its bilateral relations with Europe. On 29 June, top-level diplomats from six Eastern Partnership countries and several senior EU officials, including Johannes Hahn, the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations, met for the fifth round of informal ministerial dialogue with EaP countries.

The foreign ministers of Belarus, Georgia and Armenia, who were joined by deputy foreign ministers from Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, discussed the foreign policy agenda, while their colleagues from environmental agencies explored their respective agenda.

[Vladimir Makei](#) used the event to promote [his ideas](#) of stronger cooperation and dialogue between the Eastern Partnership and Russia as well as harmonising the integration processes between the EU and the EAEU. Both ideas have thus far gotten the cold shoulder from diplomats and experts alike.

In the few past weeks, Belarus also held consultations on the deputy minister level with Switzerland, Poland, Croatia, Turkey and Slovenia, in an attempt to maintain the more positive aspects of its bilateral ties with Europe. Belarusian diplomats have been expressing a cautious hope that, in contrast to their prior experience, they will be able to uphold and further develop these ties after the presidential election.

South Asia High on Agenda

[Alexander Lukashenka](#) personally led a Belarusian diplomatic offensive in South and Central Asia in recent weeks. During

his official visit to Pakistan on 28 and 29 May, the Belarusian delegation signed two dozen documents, most of which are, however, interagency agreements of lesser importance.

In Islamabad, Lukashenka voiced some exotic business ideas, which defy both economic logic and developmental realities. First, the president suggested that Pakistan opens hi-tech companies in the [Sino-Belarusian industrial park](#) near Minsk. Second, he invited Pakistani textile entrepreneurs to set up garment manufacturing plants in Belarus.

Official reports failed to make mention of any discussion of potential security and defence cooperation between the two countries, while [Pakistan remains strongly interested](#) in acquiring new technology from Belarus. Minsk has certainly had to factor in New Delhi's reaction to any kind of cooperation with Pakistan, especially in light of the forthcoming senior-level meeting between Belarus and India.

On 3 and 4 June, Pranab Mukherjee, India's president, paid an official visit to Minsk. As was true with [the Chinese head of state's visit to Minsk](#), Belarusian state propaganda used this opportunity to claim Belarus' special relationship with yet another of the world's economic powerhouses.

Alexander Lukashenka voiced bizarre business ideas in an attempt to lure in investors

The Belarusian authorities identified the establishment of a diplomatic presence in India as the most realistic way to penetrate this [highly protected market](#). Nevertheless, thus far many ambitious projects have failed to pass through India's corrupt and utterly bureaucratic purchasing process and many serious businessmen remain highly sceptical about growing trade with India. Alexander Lukashenka even referred to this attitude during his meeting with his Indian counterpart, inviting the latter to prove sceptics wrong.

The Belarusian president kept voicing his unorthodox ideas by inviting Indian business executives to set up ventures at the Sino-Belarusian Park. So desperate is Lukashenka in attracting residents to the industrial park that he disregarded the strong geopolitical rivalry between India and China.

Africa Also in Focus

In line with Lukashenka's instructions to expand Belarus' export's reach, the foreign ministry recently turned towards both old and new partners in Africa.

Koutoub Moustapha Sano, Guinea's minister for international cooperation, visited Minsk on 16-18 June. To date, the two countries have had almost no meaningful economic or political ties. In fact, Conakry's government agencies previously disregarded the draft agreements for cooperation in trade and agriculture, which Minsk submitted for their consideration several years ago.

Guinea gets interested in a Belarusian style 'agro-town'

Nevertheless, Belarus still seeks to engage this Ebola-stricken country by pushing for economic cooperation, mostly in agriculture but also in mining and other industries. According to the Guinean foreign ministry, the two countries agreed on implementing three priority projects in Guinea: building an agro-town modelled after similar settlements in Belarus, deliveries of agricultural machinery and accessories, and building a grain silo facility.

Around the same time, Belarusian deputy foreign minister [Valentin Rybakov](#) visited Egypt and Mozambique. He brought with him a large delegation of officials and businessmen, mostly dealing in agriculture and heavy machinery.

In Maputo, Rybakov was received by Carlos Agostinho do Rosário, Mozambique's prime minister. However, the fate of

many ambitious joint projects that Rosário's predecessor, Alberto Vaquina, discussed [in Minsk a year ago](#) remains an open question. At that time, Alexander Lukashenka even called Mozambique one of Belarus' "footholds" in Africa – so far, a doubtful proposition.

Multi-Vector Diplomacy with Trade in Focus – Belarus Foreign Policy Digest

In the first weeks of April, Belarus focused on expanding its ties with Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

Johannes Hahn, the EU "Neighbourhood" Commissioner has become one more senior EU official to visit Belarus in recent months. The last time his predecessor, Štefan Füle, came to Minsk was back in 2010.

On the Asian front, Belarus has managed to take into account the strained web of relations between the region's superpowers – China, India and Pakistan. Officials in Minsk work on the next month's "milestone" visit of China's president to Minsk.

Preparing Milestone Visit of China's "Paramount Leader"

Belarus and China have been earnestly working on organising the forthcoming visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Belarus. At a special meeting with senior government officials in April, Belarus' President [Alexander Lukashenka](#) labelled the visit, scheduled on 10-12 May, as "unprecedented".

Belarus and China want more tangible results from cooperation

On 8–9 April, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi paid an official visit to Belarus where he met with his counterpart Vladimir Makei and President Alexander Lukashenka. Concurrently, on 8–11 April, [Alexander Kosiniec](#), head of Lukashenka's Presidential Administration, visited China. More recently, on 17 April, President Lukashenka received Vice Minister of Commerce Zhong Shan. These visits are aimed primarily at preparing for Xi Jinping's visit to Minsk.

Belarus and China both view their relations in terms of being a comprehensive strategic partnership. According to Wang Yi, the two countries have only one issue before them, "to turn the high level of political relations into more tangible and substantial results in terms of cooperation".

Both parties have agreed to join efforts in promoting Xi Jinping's "Silk Road Economic Belt" initiative. They feel that Belarus is an important element of this project, one that has the [China – Belarus industrial park "Great Stone"](#) as its linchpin.

China insists that the Silk Road Economic Belt will play only a complementary role to the various Russian-led Eurasian integration projects underway. However, some experts see the initiative as a competitive project and an attempt to establish China as an alternative pole of influence for Russia's neighbours.

Maintaining A Delicate Balance in Relations with Asian Nations

Foreign Minister [Vladimir Makei](#) visited New Delhi on 14–15 April, accompanied by a delegation of major Belarusian manufacturers. He met with India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj (ANI news agency described this meeting as a mere [courtesy call](#)) and called on President Shri Pranab Mukherjee. The Indian president confirmed his plans to visit Belarus soon.

The Belarusian delegation also met with executives from several Indian companies and discussed [military and technical cooperation](#) in the defence ministry.

Belarus seeks to expand trade with India

Both countries have a sound mutual understanding with regards to international matters, in particular, on human trafficking. Meanwhile, bilateral trade is presently sitting at around only \$400m annually. Belarus is India's second largest supplier of potash fertiliser and India is a key supplier of pharmaceuticals for Belarus.

Belarus seeks to enter the Indian market with its agricultural machinery and lorries. This is an ambitious endeavour as India has a highly bureaucratic and corrupt purchasing process for important contracts. Beyond this, India has highly prohibitive tariffs for imports that aim at stimulating local manufacturing and transfer of technology.

Makei's visit to New Delhi also served as a counterbalance to expanding relations between Belarus and India's biggest rival, China. In the same vein, Deputy Foreign Minister [Valentin Rybakov](#)'s visit to Islamabad on 1–3 April sought to maintain some balance for another regional rivalry, between India and Pakistan. Rybakov led a large delegation of Belarusian officials and manufacturers who conducted negotiations in many areas with a focus on trade, investment and [military cooperation](#).

Emphasising Relations with the Middle East

The first half of April witnessed an intensive push for greater contact between Belarus and several Middle Eastern nations. Valentin Rybakov visited Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. In Doha on 12–14 April, the deputy foreign minister opened a Belarusian embassy, held talks with his Qatari counterpart and met with Prime Minister Al Thani. On 15 April

in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, Valentin Rybakov held the first round of political consultations between Belarus and the UAE and met with the Emirates' minister of economy.

Rich Gulf monarchies and war-torn countries: trading with everybody

[Qatar](#) and the UAE, two of the richest countries in the region, have of late become Belarus' preferred partners in the region. The foreign ministry is overextending itself to implement Lukashenka's ambitious plans, especially those formulated during his recent "[breakthrough](#)" visit to the Emirates.

Belarus also sees potential in developing trade relations with Syria and Iraq, two Middle Eastern countries that are now suffering from internal strife.

On 2 April, Belarus and Syria held a meeting of the bilateral commission for trade and economic relations in Minsk. The Syrian delegation led by the ministry of industry also met with Deputy Prime Minister Mikhail Rusy and visited a number of Belarusian companies.

On 8–11 April, the first-ever official visit of an Iraqi foreign minister to Belarus took place. Ibrahim Al Jaafari met with his Belarusian counterpart and held talks with the Belarusian ministries of health, education and industry as well as the Belarusian parliament. This visit reaffirmed the ongoing renaissance of the bilateral ties that was initiated by [Vladimir Makei's trip to Baghdad](#) last August.

Alexander Lukashenka received Ibrahim Al Jaafari on 9 April. At the meeting, the Belarusian ruler identified two areas of cooperation, which should serve as a basis for a new level of relations – trade and military cooperation. He also stressed the potential for providing academic exchanges for Iraqi students in Belarus. However, despite these stated priorities, the two countries have thus far only signed a memorandum on

cooperation between the sports ministries.

Intense Push for Contact with Europe Continues

On 16–17 April, Johannes Hahn, the EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, paid his first visit to Minsk. He held talks with Alexander Lukashenka and Vladimir Makei but also met with Belarusian opposition activists.

Human rights and democracy are not among Belarus' priorities in its relations with Europe

The parties focused their discussion on reforming the Eastern Partnership in the context of its forthcoming Riga summit. "We would like to see [the Eastern partnership] reformatted from its typical take on politics... to closer cooperation in specific areas based on solving economic problems", Alexander Lukashenka stressed.

The Belarusian leader pointed to the transfer of technology, trade, regional security and suppression of cross-border crime, such as illegal traffic in drugs and nuclear materials, as priority areas of cooperation between Belarus and the EU.

While Johannes Hahn's visit was the key event of Belarus' interaction with Europe in recent weeks, several other encounters have complemented the growing web of ties. On the days of Hahn's visit, Belarus hosted senior diplomats from the Weimar Triangle (France, Germany and Poland) and the Visegrad Four (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic). The foreign ministry also held consultations with Estonia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia.