

Investments from the Gulf, EU energy cooperation, animal welfare law – state press digest

Belarus tries to attract investments from the Persian Gulf states. The EU suggests closer cooperation with Belarus in the energy sector. Belarus ranks 37th in the world in the Doing Business-2017 report.

The government introduces significant amendments to animal welfare legislation. The KEF-Economic Forum 2016 finishes in Minsk; it attracted businessmen, economists, bankers, and experts from the IMF and UN.

This and more in the new edition of the state press digest.

Politics and policy

[Belarus's relations with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates continue to develop.](#) The president of Belarus visited Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in order to strengthen cooperation. Lukashenka held talks with Qatari Sheik Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, reports *Belarus Segodnya*. At present, Belarus and Qatar are working on several mutual projects, including hotels and healthcare.

Qatar has also shown particular interest in the Belarusian food and timber industries. Among other agreements, the Belarusian Development Bank has received preferential terms for Qatari loans. A meeting with Sheik Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in the UAE also took place. Both parties discussed projects in the high-tech, military-technical, and scientific

fields. Starting next year, the Minsk Tractor Plant will be supplying vehicles to the Emirates.

[The EU and Belarus discuss further cooperation in the energy sector.](#) The European Commission expressed interest in developing relations with Belarus in the energy sector, reports *Belarus Segodnya*. Andrea Victorin, Head of the EU Delegation to Belarus, made a statement entitled "Pan-European Integration Processes: Towards a Mutual Vision through Cross-Border Synergies" at the international conference.

In her statement, she maintained that energy security in the EU neighbourhood will remain a priority. In October 2016, the European Union signed a mobility partnership with Belarus. Negotiations on migration and cross-border crime are also taking place. In addition, Andrea Victorin highlighted the contribution of Belarus to conflict resolution in Ukraine.

[Belarus prepares a new law on animal welfare.](#) Under the new law, all domestic animals will have to be registered, after which they will receive an official ID, writes *Soyuznoe Veche*. The new law also states that regardless of apartment size, one family will only be allowed to own one cat and one dog.

According to the law, killing an animal will be punishable by 15 days in gaol. The law also provides a set of rules for keeping pets; people who violate these will be subjected to administrative sanctions. Another article of the law regulates taxation of dog ownership. Owners will now have to pay different taxes depending on the breed of the dog. This tax will come into effect starting in 2017 and will be higher for dog breeds considered dangerous.

Economy

[Belarus goes up 7 points in the "Doing Business-2017" ranking.](#) Belarus ranked 37th out of 190 countries for best conditions

for entrepreneurship, reports *Zviazda*. The top ten countries included New Zealand, the Nordic countries, the USA, Hong Kong, and others. Estonia took the highest place among post-Soviet states, ranking 12th, while Tajikistan reportedly suffered from the worst business conditions among CIS countries (ranking 128th).

The rating also considered reforms currently being implemented in the field of entrepreneurship. Over the last year, Belarus has implemented four reforms, some of which are attempting to simplify property registration. The remaining reforms concern the streamlining and transparency of business procedures.

✘ [MAZ assembly will take place in Vietnam](#). During his visit to Vietnam, Deputy Prime Minister [Uladzimir Siamaška](#) and Minister of Industry [Vitaľ Voŭk](#) signed a number of documents with representatives of the Vietnamese government. “MAZ Asia”, a subsidiary of a Belarusian heavy machinery producer, will be part of the first mutual project between Belarus and Vietnam; it will involve joint production of 1500 units per year, reports *Zviazda*.

In addition, several Belarusian and Vietnamese companies have signed supply and co-production contracts. For instance, the company Auviet Industry will receive 200 vehicles from MAZ. According to documents, “MAZ Asia” plans to sell vehicles in Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines.

[The KEF-Economic Forum 2017 concluded in Minsk](#). Businessmen, economists, bankers from Belarus and other countries, and experts from the IMF and the UN discussed the economic development of Belarus. Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration [Mikalaj Snapkoŭ](#) stressed the need for investment in science and education, as well as improvement of the business and investment climate.

Belarus Segodnya notes that the participants of the forum recognised the success of the Belarusian government in

stabilising currency rates, minimalising inflation, and increasing the gold reserve. Forum participants agreed on the need for a proper development strategy. Specific attention should be paid to production efficiency.

The head of the EU Delegation, Andrea Victorin, called on Belarus to develop further with the help of the EU. The Belarusian side noted that the EU must reconsider the regulation of relations between Belarus and the EU, which is currently based on a document from 1989, when the country was part of the USSR.

Society

[Foreign tourists are taking advantage of opportunities to visit Belarus visa-free.](#) 46 foreigners have visited Belarus under the terms of the agreement, which came into effect on 26 October, reports *Hrodzienskaja Praŭda*. Tourists can enter Belarus at several checkpoints: "Bruzhi" and "Liasnaja-Rudaŭka" on the Polish-Belarusian border, and "Pryvałka," on the Belarusian-Lithuanian border.

Of the 43 people who have entered Belarus visa free, 14 are Poles, 15 are Lithuanians, and four are Spanish. *Hrodzienskaja Praŭda* recalled that foreign tourists can stay in Hrodna for five days. The regulations will remain in effect until December 31, 2017.

The state press digest is based on review of state-controlled publications in Belarus. Freedom of the press in Belarus remains restricted and state media convey primarily the point of view of the Belarusian authorities. This review attempts to give the English-speaking audience a better understanding of how Belarusian state media shape public opinion in the country.