



This report was undertaken as part of ***Paving the Road towards Visa-free Travel between the Eastern Partnership countries and the EU***, a project of PASOS (Policy Association for an Open Society), supported by the Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative (LGI) of Open Society Foundations.

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# Belarus Country Report

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## Executive Summary

Relations between the European Union and Belarus have been mostly absent for the period of 1996-2008. Basic legal documents that would regulate bilateral relations and ensure Belarus' full participation in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) have not been ratified or adopted because of the authoritarian nature of the governing regime of President Aliaksandr Lukashenka. Ratification of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was frozen in 1997. Belarus does not enjoy full benefits of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), there is no ENP Action Plan in place.

Following the warming up of relations between Belarus and the EU in 2008, high-level political contact resumed and technical cooperation began to move forward. In light of the new political setting, the Jointed Interim Plan (JIP) is being currently prepared by the European Commission (EC), which is aimed to resemble an Action Plan and will outline the path of reforms for Belarus in areas of economy, law, justice and security, and other. Among issues to be offered for Member States' consideration is conclusion and implementation of visa facilitation and readmission agreements. Prospects for long term visa liberalisation may be included in the JIP too, if agreed upon by the EU Member States.

The EU has not yet begun official talks with Belarus on visa facilitation and readmission agreements, however several technical assessment missions to Minsk by EU experts took place. On 12 November, the Commission recommended that the Council authorises the Commission to open negotiations on agreements to facilitate the procedures for issuing short stay visas and on readmission between the European Union and Belarus. The next

crackdown in Belarus seriously worsened its relations with the European Union but did not touch the plans regarding visa facilitation talks. In the EU's Council Conclusions of January 31<sup>st</sup> the Council stated that it looks forward to the start of negotiations for visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Belarus, once the negotiating directives have been adopted.

The European Union tied visa facilitation for Belarus with a number of political conditions that official Minsk should fulfil. The absence of political will among numerous Member States of the EU and the reluctance of the Belarus government to address the EU conditions prevent central EU institutions from solving the problem of high visa fees for Belarusian citizens. Additionally, the EU lacks understanding that the visa issue is one of a few real policy tools that can be used to leverage positive political and social changes in Belarus. The question of visa policy towards Belarus instead of being a tool of government-to-government political conditionality should be used as an instrument of proactive policy.

Research results show that more opportunities for the citizens of Belarus to travel to the EU will lead to the mindset change in favour of pro-European choice of Belarusian citizens. It especially implies for modifying the consciousness of senior citizens, who are characterized by distinctive conservatism and anti-European attitudes.

If the political framework allows, visa facilitation and readmission agreements between the EU and Belarus could be completed within the 1-1,5 year period. The prospect of visa liberalisation negotiations depends on the EU internal discussions and attitudes towards its Eastern neighbours, as well as the domestic political, economic and social developments in Belarus.

In terms of its technical preparedness for the visa liberalisation dialogue with the EU, Belarus could qualify as ready for the beginning of negotiations albeit numerous shortcomings. The country is equipped to issue biometric travel documents as of 2012; issues of travel documents and their issuance, identity cards, border management, and privacy and data protection are being addressed. According to the assessment by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the country is a leader in combatting of human trafficking, although it does not fully comply with the minimum standards yet. The government demonstrates significant and sustained efforts towards progress. Some elements of the Anti-Money Laundering/ Combatting the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) regime have been developed by the relevant government structures in Belarus. The anti-corruption programme for 2007-2010 has been adopted by the President, although the issue of corruption remains a serious threat to the national security. Implementation of the GRECO recommendations can not be evaluated yet since the agreement concerning immunities and privileges of GRECO has been signed in 2010. Belarus does not cooperate with Europol, but has bilateral agreements with the EU Member States.

## **I. The state of affairs in the relations between Belarus and the EU**

*Belarus has no contractual relations with the EU. For many years official Minsk pursued a self isolation policy and build the Union State with Russia. Since 2008 Belarus has been trying to improve its relations with the EU. The crackdown after the presidential elections in December 2010 has interrupted this process.*

The EU-Belarus relations developed fast after Belarus acquired independence in 1991, but began worsen soon after the election of the President Lukashenka in 1994. In 1996-97 there were serious setbacks due to Belarus' move towards authoritarian rule. The EU grew concerned with the lack of separation of powers in Belarus, the absence of a dialogue between the authorities and the opposition, the worsening human rights conditions and the increasing restrictions on the freedom of the media and press.

After presidential elections in September 2001, the EU pointed out that "The European Union regrets that the Belarus authorities have not seized the opportunity afforded by these presidential elections to engage their country fully on the path of democracy... The European Union will continue to support the transition to democracy and will hold consultations on the subject with all the political forces of Belarus which are prepared to work in the same direction"<sup>1</sup>.

Initially, Belarus welcomed the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) concept and suggested specific areas for cooperation without, however, responding to the basic democratic requirements. Antidemocratic developments and serious human rights violations have made it impossible for EU-Belarus relations to develop further within the ENP framework. The EU remains willing to deepen its relationship with Belarus, including access to the full benefits of the ENP, once the Belarusian authorities clearly demonstrate their willingness to respect democratic values and the rule of law<sup>2</sup>.

Within the framework of the European Neighbourhood an Partnership Instrument (ENPI) Belarus is involved in regional and cross-border cooperation projects in areas such as transport, border management and customs, migration and asylum, measures against human and drug trafficking, management of man-made and natural disasters, and other areas of regional and cross-border importance. There are three cross-border cooperation areas where Belarus is a participating country: Poland-Belarus-Ukraine, Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus and Baltic Sea Region.

After another flawed presidential election in March 2006, the Council of the European Union adopted restrictive measures against President Lukashenka and a number of government officials who were personally responsible for the violations of international electoral standards. These measures took the form of a visa ban and an asset freeze. These sanctions were adopted in addition to those taken by the Council on 24 September 2004 against four Belarusian officials identified as key actors in the disappearances of four Belarusian persons; and those taken on 13 December 2004 against two officials responsible for the October 2004 fraudulent elections and referendum as well as severe human rights violations in the repression of peaceful demonstrators. In March 2007, the list of sanctions was rolled-over until April 2008.

In November 2006, the European Commission published a non paper called "What the EU could bring to Belarus"<sup>3</sup>, which outlined how closer relations with the EU could benefit the

<sup>1</sup> Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the holding of presidential elections in Belarus. Brussels, 14 September 2001.  
(<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=PESC/01/152&format=HTML&aged=1&language=E N&guiLanguage=en>)<sup>2</sup> Belarus Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013. <sup>3</sup> What the EU could bring to Belarus, Non-Paper

Belarusian population economically and in terms of political rights, living standards, mobility and social security. But Belarusian government chose to ignore this message. The "twelve conditions" from the paper were largely unnoticed also by the Belarusian society.

President Lukashenka began to consider the EU as a possible foreign policy options only when Kremlin began to pressure for privatization of the key transit infrastructure in Belarus and raised energy prices to make Belarus comply (first gas row in 2006). The EU countries, firstly immediate neighbours to Belarus, began to consider the country as a key partner in boosting energy security in the region. Lukashenka, on his part, saw warming of relations with the EU as a pure political manoeuvre that should not have led to any substantial political liberalization.

After Belarus' failure to support Russia in the war with Georgia the threat of economic sanctions from the Eastern neighbour, on the backdrop of the unwinding economic crisis, forced the official Minsk to search for alternative sources of financing deficits and attracting investments. Belarus released political prisoners, resumed cooperation with the IMF, and joined the new EU Eastern Partnership program. The visa sanctions against most regime protagonists were suspended.

To summarize, the main causes of rapprochement with the European Union were as follows: declining of the Union State project and increasing political and economic pressure from Russia; need for western investments and loans; conflict in Georgia and EU's interest to bring Belarus closer to the European Union.

A number of high-level visits from and to the country, including visits of Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner and then the EU High Representative for Common and Foreign Security Policy Javier Solana took place. The EU-Belarus dialogue meetings at ministerial level helped strengthening political contacts. As of 2008, the Commission engaged with Belarus in intensified talks on sectoral reforms (energy, transport, environment, customs and border management, agriculture and rural development, financial services and product regulation, standards and conformity assessment). The EU-Belarus Human Rights dialogue was launched in 2009.

Until today, the EU has no contractual relations with Belarus. The only legal basis for bilateral trade relations is the EU-USSR Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) which still applies. Although the European Union and Belarus signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1995, this agreement, as well as the Interim Agreement, was frozen in 1997. Currently, the European Commission is in the process of developing the Joint Interim Plan (JIP) that will resemble an ENP Action Plan, but contain fewer provisions due to absence of a ratified PCA between the EU and Belarus.

Belarus is amongst the few states in Europe that have not stated its intent to join the EU. Similarly, the European Union has not offered membership prospects for Belarus either.

Due to the authoritarian rule of the President Lukashenka and his self-isolationist policies, Belarus has received far less assistance than its neighbours. EC technical assistance to Belarus has, in line with the 1997 General Affairs Council Conclusions, been limited "to humanitarian or regional projects or those which directly support the democratisation process". Under the National Tacis Programme, since 2004 assistance has been focusing on support for civil

society, higher education cooperation and alleviation of the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

Assistance provided under the National Indicative Programme for Belarus (2007-11) focuses on the two priority areas of “Social and Economic Development” and “Democratic Development and Good Governance”. An allocation of €20 million was initially earmarked for the period 2007-2010. Following the positive developments in EU-Belarus relations in 2008, the overall allocation was increased to € 30 million for the same period, with an allocation of €5 million per year for 2007 and 2008 and €10 million per year for 2009 and 2010. The national indicative programme is now extended to include the year 2011 with an additional indicative allocation of € 16.07 million (this includes € 1.07 million for Comprehensive Institution Building preparatory measures under the Eastern Partnership)<sup>4</sup>.

## **II. The Visa facilitation process**

*Belarus has not concluded VFA with the EU. The issue of visa facilitation has been tied with political conditions that Minsk had to fulfil. Due to the new EU's approach the talks on VFA are to start in 2011.*

The EU's visa policy towards Belarusian citizens is regulated by the EU Visa Code. Unlike its neighbours, Belarusians are obligated to pay 60 Euro for a Schengen visa and the visa application procedure is still complicated and often even humiliating for them.

Though informal technical consultations on visa procedures simplification started in February 2008<sup>4</sup>, the official negotiations on visa facilitation have not began yet. The European Commission is developing its suggestions to the Council in order to receive the latter's mandate for the beginning of the dialogue.

For many years the European Union tied visa facilitation for Belarus with a number of political conditions that official Minsk should fulfil. The absence of political will among numerous Member States of the EU and the reluctance of the Belarus government to address the EU conditions prevent central EU institutions from solving the problem of Schengen visas for the Belarusians. Additionally, the EU lacks understanding that the visa issue is one of a few real policy tools that can be used to leverage positive political and social changes in Belarus. A certain 'mindset change' in Brussels and among member states is necessary. The question of visa policy towards Belarus instead of being a tool of government-to-government political conditionality should be used as an instrument of proactive policy.

The visit of EU's Commissioner Stefan Füle to Minsk in November 2010 was a very good sign for perspectives of VFA agreement for Belarus. In his statement Mr. Füle announced that Belarus-EU talks on visa facilitation would start next year and would not be dependent on Belarus' progress in domestic political issues.

<sup>4</sup>National Indicative Programme for Belarus (2007-11). <sup>5</sup>Interview with

On 12 November, the Commission recommended that the Council authorises the Commission to open negotiations on agreements to facilitate the procedures for issuing short-stay visas and on readmission between the European Union and Belarus<sup>6</sup>.

The Commission is proposing to the Member States a list of facilitations which relate to issuing multiple-entry visas with a long period of validity for bona fide travellers, waiving/reducing the handling fees for specific categories to be defined, setting deadlines for processing visa applications, as well as a possible exemption from the visa obligation for holders of diplomatic passports.

Visa facilitation is very important for Belarusian citizens as this will allow them to obtain visas cheaper and easier. In particular, the new system will provide for a more predictable and transparent process of obtaining a visa at around half of the present costs. This will certainly improve exchanges and contacts between the Belarusian people and the people of the European Union. At the same time readmission will ensure the return of those who illegally stay in the EU to their home country.

The post-election crackdown in Belarus seriously worsened its relations with the European Union but fortunately this did not touch the plans regarding visa facilitation talks. In the EU's Council Conclusions of January 31<sup>st</sup> the Council "recalls the importance it attaches to facilitating people-to-people contacts with Belarus to the benefit of the Belarusian population at large. It looks forward to the start of negotiations for visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Belarus, once the negotiating directives have been adopted. Pending the conclusion of such agreements, the EU will encourage the optimal use of the existing flexibilities offered by the Visa Code, in particular the possibilities for Member States to waive and reduce visa fees for certain categories of citizens"<sup>7</sup>.

In December 2010 Head of the Department for Migration and Citizenship at the Ministry of Internal Affairs Alexei Begun stated that Belarus was fully ready for negotiations with European Union over visa regime simplification. It was noted that first biometric passports will appear in Belarus by 2012 and that the final decision concerning this issue will be made in 2011<sup>8</sup>.

The government of Belarus is in a win-win situation when it comes to the question of Schengen visas for its citizens. Success in lowering visa fees would be credited to the authorities. Similarly, possible failure to sign a visa facilitation and readmission agreement could be used by the state propaganda for undermining the EU credibility and suggesting its hostility towards ordinary citizens of Belarus. Few contacts between the Belarusian and the EU citizens play in government's favour too: limited travel opportunities for Belarusians help to control the public opinion. It is a comfortable situation for the government of Belarus: to carry out the policy of isolation with the hands of the EU itself<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Commission recommends the negotiation of Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements with Belarus, International Consortium "EUROBELARUS" (<http://eurobelarus.info/content/view/5876/78/>)<sup>7</sup> Council conclusions on Belarus. 3065th FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting. Brussels, 31 January 2011 ([http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/119038.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/119038.pdf))<sup>8</sup> Belarus fully ready for negotiations with European Union over visa regime simplification (<http://www.tvr.by/eng/society.asp?id=39964>).<sup>9</sup> Dzianis Melyantsou and Vitali Silitski, How to Lower Schengen Visa Fees for Belarusians. BISS, 2008.



In October 2010 Belarus and Lithuania signed the Agreement on the Procedure for the Mutual Travels of Border Area Residents which significantly simplifies the rules implied to local border traffic. The agreement foresees that certain groups of border area residents will be able to cross the border if it possession of a special local border traffic permit. Holders of the permits will be able to stay on the territory of the other country (in the border area of 50 km) for 90 days per each six months. Holders of these permits will not have the right to work. Similar agreements were signed in 2010 with Poland and Latvia.

Belarus considers abolition of its visas for tourists from the European Union hoping for an influx of tourists from Europe and intending to improve the country's image. The main lobbyist of this idea is the Ministry of sports and tourism. If the draft decree prepared by the Ministry is approved, the citizens of EU countries travelling to Belarus with the purpose of tourism will be able to enter the territory of Belarus, without payment of consular fees but with a valid passport and a return ticket.

According to recent public opinion polls, free travel to the EU is of the most expected improvements the Belarusian people expect from the improved EU-Belarus relations (See table 1. below).

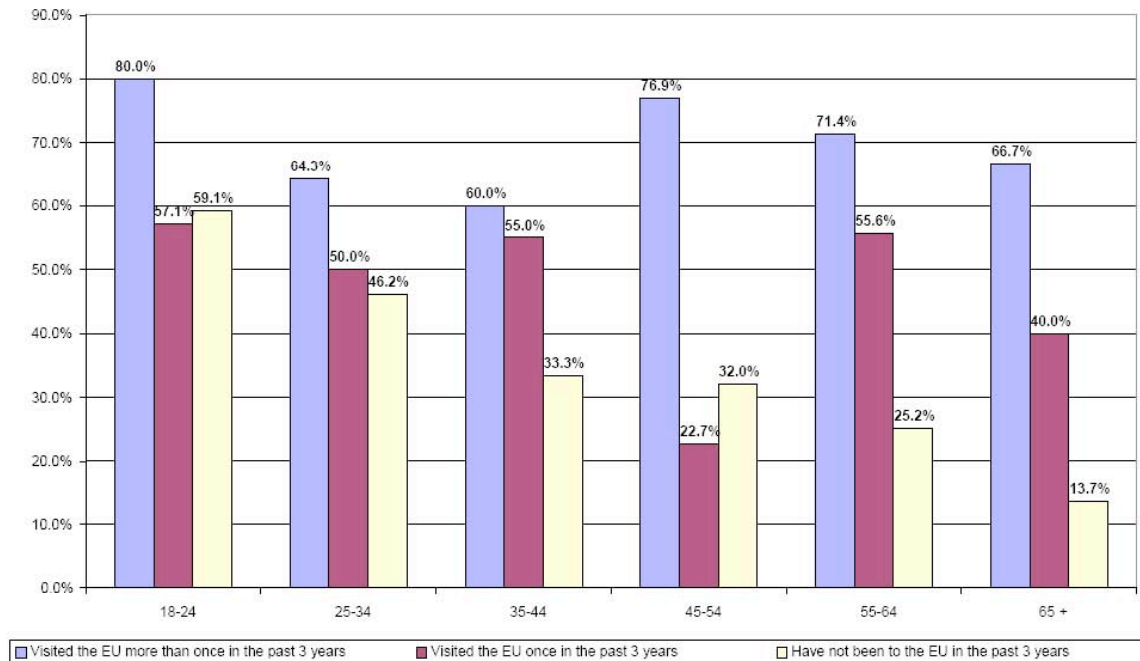
**Table 1. The answers to the question: "Since autumn 2008 we witness the warming of relations between Belarusian authorities and the European Union. What do you personally expect from this process?"**

(more than one answer is possible)<sup>10</sup>

<b>Variants of answers</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Possibility for the Belarusians to travel freely to the EU for study and work</i>	<b>37.7</b>
<i>Belarus will get closer to the European standards of politics, economy and culture</i>	29.3
<i>European investments and technologies to come to Belarus</i>	27.8
<i>Belarus will become a full member of the EU in some time</i>	21.2
<i>Free travel to the EU is highly important for mindset change in favour of pro-European choice of Belarusian citizens. The recent research<sup>11</sup> conducted by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) shows that lowering travel barriers led to an increase in pro-European attitudes in Belarus, hence an expansion in the social base of those who support changes (See Table 2. below).</i>	74.1

**Support for accession to the EU depending on the frequency of visits to the EU, in age groups**

<sup>10</sup> IISEPS national poll, December 2009 (<http://www.iiseps.org/12-09-05.html>) <sup>11</sup> Belarus and the World: Country Profile, 2010, Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, Minsk, 2010, p. 20.



The reserve for increasing support for Belarus' orientation toward the EU lies primarily in reducing the "visa barriers" between the Union and Belarus. It ought to be noted that this resource will be efficient for the most part in modifying the consciousness of senior citizens, who are characterized by distinctive conservatism and anti-European attitudes.

Research results leave no doubts that should visa formalities become easier, the number of trips to the EU by Belarusian citizens will increase significantly (roughly as much as it fell after the visa regime tightened in 2007). Consequently, the potential of "open doors" in modifying the public consciousness remains significant even though the Belarusians are "notorious" home-lovers. Notably, the transformation potential of free travel is most evident in the group of the respondents who have frequently visited the EU, which stresses the importance of an easier access to multiple-entry visas.

### **III. The state of affairs in the visa liberalisation priority areas**

*In terms of its technical preparedness for the visa liberalisation dialogue with the EU, Belarus could qualify as ready for the beginning of negotiations.*

#### **1. Document security**

Belarus doesn't issue machine-readable biometric passports yet but it is *well prepared to introduce them once it is necessary*. The issue of biometric passport has been addressed in the framework of the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) programme "MIGRABEL-MIGRAMOL: Strengthening of Migration Management in the Republic of Belarus and Moldova" (2007-2009). The project discussed the use of biometric technologies for migration management in the region, in Belarus in particular, within four key areas – travel documents and their issuance, identity cards, border management, and privacy and data protection. MIGRABEL Phase II foresees further modernisation of the national passport issuance system of Belarus, as well as establishment of the biometric control at the

Belarus/EU border<sup>12</sup>. During the first stage of the project, specialists from Belarusian government agencies took part in five working visits to Germany, France, the UK, Austria and Sweden. They became acquainted with the operation of the world's leading manufacturers of passports, chips and personalization equipment. Belarusian experts have also studied the experience of transition to biometric identification papers in the above mentioned countries.

In the framework of the MIGRABEL project in July 2009 the Belarusian Ministry of Interior has bought scanners and all other necessary equipment to produce biometric passports. First pilot samples of the document have been introduced (they are used by Belarusian sailors). During the second stage of the project, the legislative basis is to be developed. The Ministry announced that Belarus plans to issue biometric travel documents as of 2012 followed by issuance of biometric passports<sup>13</sup>. According to the Minister of Internal Affairs A. Kuleshov the process of biometric passports introduction to the general public could be organized within two or two and a half years after adoption of the decision by the President<sup>14</sup>.

## ***2. Illegal immigration***

Belarus has rather effective border management policy, which is recognised and positively assessed by experts from the EU and leading international organisations. A number of projects were implemented jointly by the European Commission, the UNDP and Belarusian government in this field.

In 2002, the Belarusian border guards received equipment worth 445 thousand Euro in total under the project "Strengthening of Border Control at the Belarusian-Ukrainian Border". In 2003 – 2005, in the framework of the programmes "Fighting Trafficking of Women in Belarus" and the BUMAD Programme on fight against illegal drugs ("Programme for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and the Fight Against Drug Trafficking in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova") the State Border Committee of Belarus received equipment worth 255 thousand Euro. A national info-network on drugs and trafficking of human beings was set up and technical capability for finding and detaining narcotic substances on land border crossing points was improved. The third stage of the BUMAD was focused on personnel training by the Border Committee jointly with the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In 2005 – 2006 "Improvement of Border management in Belarus" (BOMBEL 1) project was implemented with overall budget 4.7 mln Euro. Main aims of the programme were:

-To carry out comprehensive training for Belarusian border guards in the area of improvement of border protection and compliance with the EU standards; -To improve the automated system of passport control and integrated system of communication of the Border Committee (air border crossing points were equipped with modern equipment);

<sup>12</sup> International Organization for Migration

(<http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/activities/europe/easterneurope/belarus>)<sup>13</sup> "Belarusian biometric passport to meet all world standards", Belteleradiocompany, 2010

(<http://www.tvr.by/eng/society.asp?id=33508>)<sup>14</sup> У белорусского биометрического паспорта

-To renovate and bring the Canine Centre of the Border Committee in Smorgon up to the European standards; -To organize an international conference on cross-border cooperation with the participation of representatives of the countries determining Border Security in Europe; -To create at the Belarusian-Polish border in Brest a modern centre for detaining illegal migrants in compliance with European standards; -To purchase equipment for detecting radioactive substances and carry out appropriate training for border guards.

In September 2006, the EU/UNDP project "Enhancing the System of Immigration Control at the State Border of the Republic of Belarus" (BOMBEL-2) was launched with an overall budget 9.066 mln Euro. The project implementation resulted in:

- seven mobile border posts;
- new equipment in the three mobile border posts at the border with Ukraine;
- new cars purchased for subdivisions;
- a system of detection and registration of trespassers;
- an automated system of border control at all border crossing points of the Belarusian border which allowed the abolition of exit stamps for Belarusian citizens.

Today the third phase of the project (BOMBEL-3) is being implemented. It is aimed at creation of a modern data transmission network on the basis of fiber-optic technology on the Western border of Belarus --with the EU countries. All works are planned to be finished in June, 2012<sup>15</sup>.

Belarus adopted biannual state programs to counteract trafficking in human beings and illegal migration. On 2 October 2010, the President of Belarus signed Decree No. 518 on the State Programme to Counteract Trafficking in Human Beings, Illegal Migration and the Related Unlawful Acts for the years 2011-2013. The programme places the main emphasis on expansion of media coverage related to counteraction against trafficking in human beings, illegal migration and other unlawful acts, such as production, placement and broadcast of updated materials, social TV and other media products. Relevant agencies will monitor financial flows coming from countries with migration problems, send victims of human trafficking to rehabilitation centres, address international organizations and public associations<sup>16</sup>.

Other activities on combatting human trafficking include development of cooperation with international institutions, attraction of financial resources for information campaigns and research, ratification of existing treaties and conclusion of new international agreements in this field.

According to the Chief of Belarus' Office of the International Organization for Migration Dejan Keserovic, *Belarus is an indisputable leader in combating of human trafficking* and its national legislation in this sphere complies with all international standards<sup>17</sup>.

### **3. Public order and security**

<sup>15</sup> BOMBEL-3 will help upgrade telecommunication infrastructure on Belarus-Poland border, Rachkovsky says. BELTA, 29.03.2010 (<http://news.belta.by/en/news/society?id=509524>) <sup>16</sup> BELTA, 04.10.2010



subject to special control and take other measures to deter money laundering (ML). Two specialised agencies exercise financial intelligence responsibilities. ML offenses are investigated and prosecuted. Nevertheless, gaps and misalignments in the current legal and institutional arrangements, as well as incomplete implementation undermine the full effectiveness of the AML/CFT regime. The authorities are aware of *the need to update and reshape the present AML/CFT regime and they are well advanced on a reform agenda*<sup>19</sup>. They demonstrated a desire and intention to comply with international standards and have drafted a new AML Law in line with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations.

The Anti-corruption programme approved by the President of Belarus for the period of 2007-2010 pays special attention to inspections in spheres that are most corruption prone: construction of state subsidized property, provision of living quarters from the state-owned housing stock, provision of land plots by local authorities, deliveries of oil products and sales of products of the fuel-energy and petrochemical industries, credit-financial and banking spheres, licensing of some types of activities, sales of the material resources which were once in the ownership of the Armed Forces.

Measures taken by the state in the previous years, including the implementation of a Governmental Programme for the Years 2002-2006 to Accelerate the Fight against Corruption allowed to improve the legislative basis and define basic entering points and forms of prevention. However, *corruption continues to undermine the country's socio-economic development and therefore remains a serious threat to the national security.*

Belarus has signed the agreement concerning immunities and privileges of GRECO representatives and evaluators only in January 2010, therefore it is too early yet to evaluate its progress in implementation of the GRECO recommendations.

In 2008, the Belarus' National Assembly approved the Law on Information, Informatization and Data Protection, which a legal basis for international cooperation in this area. Under the given law, the President and the Council of Ministers define and implement the country's information and privacy policies. The State Center on Informational Security and the National Academy of Sciences defined technical measures to protect information and keep a registry of the providers of said data.

At present, Belarus has no cooperation agreement with the Europol and cooperates only with law-enforcement bodies of some EU member-states on bilateral basis.

#### ***4. External relations and fundamental rights***

All groups of Belarusian society potentially have access to travel and identity documents. However, according to the recently adopted “Law On The Order of Travelling Abroad” some categories of people have no right to leave Belarus (including persons under trial, top-managers of firms declared bankrupt etc.). Human rights defenders are worried that the government can use this law to prevent opposition activists to travel abroad.

Currently effective legislation does not contain explicitly the so called “Anti-discrimination law”, which regulates the principles for the equal treatment resting on the prohibition of

[illegible]

discrimination and the means of legal protection against its violation. But the Belarusian Constitution proclaims that one of its fundamental principles is the equality of citizens “without any discrimination”. Belarus also has signed and ratified The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.



#### IV. Main recommendations for the further research

-Focus on stakeholder analysis and possibility to influence the visa liberalization process (incl. NGOs, interest groups etc.) -Legal analysis of existing laws in terms of their compliance with EU's requirements -Evaluation of the EU projects in visa related areas in every EaP country -To study the level of awareness about visa facilitation and liberalization processes in the governments. ---

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