

'WE HAVE LOST LIBYA AND A NUMBER OF OTHER STATES...'

CASE STUDY OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN BELARUS AND AFRICAN COUNTRIES FROM 1992 TO 2013

Siarhiej Bohdan

Introduction

From a historical and political perspective, Africa consists of two parts:

- a) a strip of Arabic-speaking states in the north, i.e. Maghrib, the west of the Islamic world, which is sometimes regarded as part of the Middle East;
- b) and sub-Saharan Africa, which is quite separate from them.

This division, however, looks less distinct in the context of Belarusian foreign policy. The African countries are apparently viewed as a single political dimension. Moreover, some specific traits of historical evolution of Belarusian foreign policy demonstrate a close linkage in the relations with some North African states and sub-Saharan Africa.

In general Minsk has had three priorities in its relations with African countries ever since contacts were established, namely Libya, Sudan and the Republic of South Africa. At present, however, there are some dynamic changes underway, with cooperation being extended to new dimensions.

Belarus – Africa relations have never developed on a large scale – for objective reasons, such as limited potential for cooperation and only a certain degree of interest in each other that Belarus and African states have. The limited cooperation is one of the reasons why in a situation when very little research has been done on Belarusian policy in the developing world there are hardly any studies of Belarus – African relations, except for a few short articles about the relations with North African countries¹ and the related fragments in monographs.²

Furthermore, even the media give a more superficial coverage to Belarus' relations with Africa than with other regions. While the government media restrict their information to simply giving facts in a positive light without revealing the context, the others mainly focus on 'disclosure' of alleged abuses made by the Belarusian government in its cooperation with African countries. Here again facts are all too often reinterpreted too loosely and out of the relevant context. (A good example is the coverage of the events around the Belarusian planes shot down in Somalia.) That is why this study does not only present an analysis of the major aspects of Belarus – Africa relations but also attempts to outline their overall context.

¹ Татьяна Евсейчик. О развитии отношений и перспективах сотрудничества Республики Беларусь и Королевства Марокко. Белорусский журнал международного права и международных отношений 2003 – № 2, <http://evolutio.info/content/view/629/54/>. Date of access: 21/08/2009.

² See, for example: Свилас, С. Ф. Отношения Республики Беларусь со странами арабского мира в 1996 – 2006 годах: учеб. пособие / С. Ф. Свилас, Т. В. Евсейчик. Минск: БГУ, 2009.; or Челядинский, А. А. Международные отношения на Ближнем и Среднем Востоке на современном этапе: учебно - метод. комплекс / А. А. Челядинский. Минск: Веды, 2007; or Лашкевич, С. А. Африка в современном мире / С. А. Лашкевич, А. А. Челядинский. Минск: Право и экономика, 2010.

Overview of Belarus - Africa Relations and Their Chronology

Belarus – Africa relations on the whole even more vividly exemplify problems typical of the Belarusian policies towards the developing states in general. The most essential one is the instability of relations.

Firstly, the exports and trade with nearly all African countries oscillate significantly. Secondly, it is problematic to develop stable all-embracing relations, even if a certain narrow aspect thrives. Here the relations with Sudan provide a good example. Although Khartoum used to buy weapons from Belarus on a steady basis and probably had its military officers taught and trained in Minsk, the Sudanese government did not reciprocate the attempts to extend the cooperation, made by official Minsk. Thus, the first meeting of the Belarus – Sudan Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation took place on 12 – 15 January, 2005, but the second still has not been held, even though Belarus announced that it was to take place in the autumn of 2012.³ Now the second meeting is scheduled for 2014.⁴ This clearly shows that the second problem in the relations with a number of African countries is very limited projects or fields for cooperation and difficulties in establishing all-encompassing partnership.

The Belarus' policies towards African states can be divided into the following three periods:

- 1) 1996–2003 was the time of establishing relations, with Libya and South Africa as the priorities for Belarus;
- 2) 2003–2010 was the stage of developing and broadening the relations, with Libya and Sudan as the priorities;
- 3) 2010–2013 was the period when the relations with Libya were broken and the contacts with Sudan curtailed. Belarus tried to change its orientation, South Africa and Nigeria becoming new priorities.

From the 1990s to the 2010s Belarus was able to establish comparatively meaningful and stable political and economic relations only with some of the North African states and the Republic of South Africa. This can be explained by a number of objective reasons, including instability in most of the sub-Saharan countries. It does not only mean insolvency or unreliability of many potential partners but also leads to no guarantees of safety in doing business. This invariably results in losing interest in these countries, as they cannot become a source of investment or loans or markets for Belarusian products and services.

In the final analysis, Africa as a continent is virtually non-existent in the geographical scope of Belarusian diplomacy and economic relations and sub-Saharan Africa was totally non-existent until the 2000s. The Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs clearly understood this when its officials for years announced every so often that they intended to gain a foothold in Africa. For example, this was what Foreign Minister Michail Chvastov said in his report *The African Continent and Belarus' Interests in International Relations and Economy* at the Belarusian State University as early as May 2001.⁵ He named Egypt, Libya and South Africa as priorities for partnership.

In the post-Soviet period Belarus on the whole relaunched its relations with African countries in 1996–1998, when Belarusian government delegations visited Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and South

³ О заседании белорусской части Белорусско-Суданской комиссии по сотрудничеству, Министерство иностранных дел Республики Беларусь, 25/10/2012, http://www.mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/f1c44a0b0572b641.html Прагледжана 21.12.2013.

⁴ Макей и посол Судана обсудили шаги по активизации белорусско-суданских отношений, БелТА, 12 Ноябрь 2013, http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/politics/Makej-i-posol-Sudana-obsudili-shagi-po-aktivizatsii-belorussko-sudanskix-otnoshenij_i_651720.html Date of access 21/12/2013.

⁵ Тезисы выступления Заместителя Премьер-министра – Министра иностранных дел Республики Беларусь М.М. Хвостова «Африканский континент: внешнеполитические и внешнеэкономические интересы Беларуси» перед профессорско-преподавательским составом и студентами Белорусского государственного университета, 16 мая 2001 года, г. Минск. <http://www.centis.bsu.by/rus/y2001/tesis.rar> Date of access: 24/08/2009.

Africa. President Lukashenka visited Egypt in June 1998 and Libya in November 2000. In April 2000 the President of Uganda made an official visit to Belarus.

Yet, staking on Libya as a foothold from which to advance in Africa did not lead to any tangible progress in Belarus – Africa relations in the 2000s. The wave of revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East in the early 2010s created a new reality for the Belarusian policy towards Africa. According to President Lukashenka, 'It is, of course, a pity that we have basically lost Libya and Syria, since there is a war going on there and it is difficult to have economic cooperation with these countries for the time being. We have also lost a number of other states.'⁶

Still, rethinking the policy towards Africa required time, so on 21 February 2012 as Lukashenka appointed Viačaslau Biaskosty Ambassador to Nigeria he declared that Belarus was apparently just beginning to explore Africa. 'As you know, things are so-so there,' he said. 'Even in those countries where we have embassies we haven't made much progress, but we are beginning to work very hard.'⁷ At the same time, in the early 2013 the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs still kept speaking about problems posed by the 'unfavourable conditions of the Arab Spring'.⁸

⁶ Пресс-конференция А.Г. Лукашенко белорусским и зарубежным средствам массовой информации 15 января 2013 г., Belarus National Library, website of the President of the Republic of Belarus www.president.gov.by/press140878.html Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁷ Посол Беларуси в Нигерии вручил верительные грамоты президенту этой страны, БелаПАН, 18 мая 2012, <http://news.tut.by/politics/289855.html> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁸ Сегодня отмечается 10-летний юбилей установления дипломатических отношений между Беларусью и Египтом, АФН, 01.02.2002, <http://afn.by/news/i/15048> Date of access: 24/08/2009.

International Aspects of the Belarusian Policy towards Africa

Libya as a Foothold for the Belarusian Foreign Policy in Africa

From the 1990s Libya under the Gaddafi regime was characterised by an 'extravagant economic engagement in Africa', while Gaddafi himself played an 'ambitious role in the African Union' and supported the idea of putting into practice the principles of African unity.⁹ It was believed that Gaddafi's Libya could help Belarus establish cooperation with Africa. This reasoning probably explains why official Minsk chose to open its embassy in Libya instead of Morocco, as it was originally planned in the 1990s. The actual trade with Libya couldn't have provided grounds for that decision.

Perhaps Libya was viewed not only as a potential mediator and a source of funding Belarus' projects in sub-Saharan Africa, but also as an intermediary in establishing contacts with South Africa. Libya had very close relations with South Africa during Nelson Mandela's presidency, though they worsened in the final years of Thabo Mbeki's term in office.¹⁰

Russia: a Helping Hand or a Competitor in Africa?

The Belarusian regime tried to work in Africa on its own, but it proved a real challenge. When in the early 2010s Belarus found itself in urgent need of making dramatic changes in its policies towards the developing world in general and Africa in particular, Minsk once again turned to Moscow for help. In January 2013 Belarus and Russia held consultations in Moscow on Africa and the Middle East. Within their framework Belarusian Director of the Department for Africa and the Middle East Ihar Liaščenya had a meeting with Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mikhail Bogdanov to discuss the issues of coordination in the two countries' actions in the region.¹¹

Another example was the visits of the President's Aide Viktar Šejman to Ghana as a member of joint delegations including Russian and Polish investors, though there is no information about the actual proportion of representatives in the delegations.

On the other hand, Belarus and Russia did not coordinate their actions when it came to supplying Libya with arms; perhaps they even competed with each other. According to the *Tripoli Post*, in 2008 General Aboubaker Yunis Jaber, Secretary of the Provisional General Committee for Defense 'reiterated the statement made by the Leader of the Revolution Muammar Al-Qathafi during his visit to Russia, Belarus and Ukraine that there was a "rivalry" among countries and arms companies willing to provide to Libya the most modern weapons for the best price'.¹²

⁹ Hussein Solomon and Gerrie Swart, Libya's foreign policy in flux. *African Affairs* (London) (July 2005) 104 (416): 469-492. p. 469.

¹⁰ Adekeye Adebajo, Gaddafi: the man who would be king of Africa [theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/26/gaddafi-legacy-meddling-africa), Guardian, 26 August 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/26/gaddafi-legacy-meddling-africa>; Horace Campbell, Muammar al-Gaddafi: Obstacle to African unity, *Pambazuka.org*, 2010-03-25, Issue 475, <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/panafrican/63299> Date of access: 21/12/2013

¹¹ О белорусско-российских консультациях по проблематике Африки и Ближнего Востока, Министерство иностранных дел Республики Беларусь, 23-01-2013, http://www.mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/fefea6dc91da5a9f.html Date of access: 21/12/2013

¹² Gen. Jaber: Libya Receiving the Best Arms Offers, *Tripoli Post*, 15/11/2008, <http://www.tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=1&i=2548> Date of access: 21/12/2013

Political Relations

Relations before 2002

In 1996 Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka had a conversation in Paris with the President of South Africa Nelson Mandela.

In June 1999 Valiancin Vialička, the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, visited South Africa to attend the inauguration of President Thabo Mbeki. In July 1999 a delegation of the Republic of South Africa with King of KwaZulu-Natal Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu at its head visited Belarus, invited by Minsk Tractor Plant.

In April 2000 Belarusian Foreign Minister Ural Latypaŭ had a meeting with his South African counterpart Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma during the Ministerial Meeting the Non-Aligned Movement in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. In October 2000 Mr Latypaŭ visited South Africa.

In addition, in 2000 the President of Uganda visited Belarus and in November 2001 a Zimbabwean delegation headed by Minister of Agriculture, Mechanisation and Irrigation Development Joice Mujuru paid a visit to Belarus and was received by President Lukashenka.

Relations after 2002

Methodology of Quantitative Analysis

In order to assess Belarus – Africa relations after 2002 the study implements a quantitative analysis method developed by the author. It is not applied to the period before 2002 as collecting relevant data looks rather problematic; on top of that, tracing official contacts post factum presents a serious challenge and requires a lot of resources.

The quantitative analysis is based on mapping bilateral contacts and evaluating them. To trace contacts, we used reliable official and unofficial sources, such as the nationwide media, information agencies, official statements and official websites. From 2011 onwards the relations were monitored on a regular basis within the framework of the BISS Foreign Policy Index.¹³

The methodology of quantitative analysis was originally developed in 2010 for a research project on Belarus' relations with the developing world carried out by the Political Sphere Institute for Political Studies. The project laid the foundation for creating a database of contacts with developing countries and offered an initial analysis of the relations until July 2010. The present study is a follow-up to this project.

The quantitative analysis is based on the calculation of 'engagement indices', which show how active Belarus' contacts and relations with a certain country or region are. The index is made up of the sum of quantified contacts (contacts index) and the sum of quantified representation of the countries in question (representation index).

To calculate the contacts index, each contact is assigned a numerical value of importance on a scale from one to five. It reflects the level of contacts basing on the position of the actors in the country's system of government. The level of visits is determined by the position of the highest official in the delegation. If Belarusian and foreign representatives meet in a third country, the level of the contact is determined by the position of the highest Belarusian official, but the value is divided by two, since such contacts are normally shorter and less connected with specific agreements. We apply the 'absorption principle' to delegations, where the value of the highest official 'absorbs' those of all the other members of the delegation.

Table 1. Scale of contacts and representation quantification

¹³ Belarus' Foreign Policy Index, BISS,
http://www.belinstiute.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=41&layout=blog&Itemid=35&lang=ru Date of access: 01/12/2012.

Level of the contact	Value
President	5
Prime Minister, Vice President, Head of the Presidential Administration, Head of Parliament, heir to the throne	3
Deputy Prime Ministers, key ministers (e.g. Ministers of Foreign Affairs or Defence), Secretary of the Security Council, President's Aides	2,5
Other ministers, Chief of the General Staff, high party officials	2
Other visits of some importance	1

To calculate representation indices for permanent representatives, their presence is evaluated on an annual basis, with a value of 3 for each year of an embassy's work and 2 for a consulate.

Diplomatic Missions

North Africa. The Belarusian Embassy in Tripoli has been functioning since November 2000. In the early 2010s it had four diplomats, including a military attaché.¹⁴ At present the embassy personnel has been reduced to only three diplomats and two members of support staff. In April 2001 Libya opened its embassy in Minsk.

In August 1997 Belarus opened its embassy in Cairo with three diplomats and two members of support staff.¹⁵

Sub-Saharan Africa. In January 2000 Belarus opened its embassy in Pretoria. In July 2008 the Department of the South African Embassy in the Russian Federation was opened in Minsk. The South African Ambassador to Moscow represents the country's interests in Belarus. In the early 2000s it was the South African Embassy in Poland that represented the country's interests in Belarus.

The Belarusian diplomatic mission in South Africa that opened in January 2000 has an ambassador, two diplomats and a defence attaché on staff.¹⁶ The Belarusian Embassy in Nigeria was opened in June 2012 or, according to other sources, in December 2011.¹⁷

¹⁴ Сотрудники Посольства <http://www.libya.belembassy.org/rus/membership/> Date of access: 12/08/2010.

¹⁵ Сотрудники Посольства <http://www.egypt.belembassy.org/rus/membership/> Date of access: 12/08/2010; <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/official/> Date of access: 19/11/2013.

¹⁶ Сотрудники посольства <http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/rus/staff/> Date of access: 12/08/2010; things have not changed since then: [http://rsa.mfa.gov/by/ru/embassy/official/](http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/official/) Date of access: 19/11/2013.

¹⁷ Different media gave different dates; it has been impossible to find out which was the right one.

Engagement Index for North African Countries

We have been able to trace fifty contacts with North African countries: nine in 2002; nine in 2003; seven in 2004; four in 2005; five in 2006; three in 2007; three in 2008; eight in 2009; one in 2010 and one in 2011.

Table 2. Indices of contacts and representation in Belarus' relations with North African countries

Year	Contacts Index	Representation Index	Engagement Index
2002	13,75	9	20,25
2003	17	9	24
2004	14,5	9	23,5
2005	8	9	17
2006	12	9	19
2007	6,5	9	15,5
2008	8	9	15
2009	13,75	9	22,75
2010	2	9	9
2011	1	9	10
2012	0	9	9
Sum Total from 2002 to 2012	96,5	99	195,5
Annual average	1,93	Inapplicable	17,77

The table shows that Belarus had relatively stable relations with North African countries on a quite high level in the 2000s, but 2010 marked the beginning of a slowdown even before the revolutions broke out in the region. There were apparently two factors that accounted for the fall in 2010. On the one hand, from the perspective of the domestic political situation, in 2010 Belarus was going through a presidential campaign. On the other, it was the time of rapprochement between Belarus and the West, which had an impact on the geography of the country's foreign affairs. However, the instability in North Africa since 2011 has reinforced the long-term downward trend in Belarus' relations with this region.

Military and Defence Technology Aspects of Cooperation with North African Countries¹⁸*Table 3. Military and Defence Technology Aspects of Cooperation with North African Countries*

Year	Quotient of military and defence technology contacts
2002	2,5
2003	4,5
2004	2
2005	4,5
2006	2
2007	2,5
2008	0
2009	5
2010	0
2011	0
2012	0
Sum total from 2002 to 2012	23
Share of military and defence technology contacts in the total number of contacts	23,83%

The table shows that the share of military and defence technology aspects in Belarus' relations with North Africa was high and stable. It was commensurate only with the corresponding figures of Belarus – China relations. In North Africa Belarus cooperated in this field only with Libya and Sudan.

Engagement Index for Sub-Saharan Africa¹⁹

We have been able to identify forty nine contacts: eleven in 2002; eight in 2003; three in 2004; one in 2005; five in 2006; three in 2007; five in 2008; one in 2009; three in 2010; five in 2011, none in 2012 and four in January – October 2013.

Table 4. Indices of contacts and representation in Belarus' relations with the countries of sub-Saharan Africa

Year	Contacts Index	Representation Index	Engagement Index
2002	13,5	3	16,5
2003	10,5	3	13,5
2004	3	3	6
2005	1	3	4
2006	11	3	14

¹⁸ The methodology of calculating contacts quotient in the military and defence technology field is the same as that of contacts index. To calculate the quotient, we have identified in the overall contact database and quantified those that had evident military or defence technology aspects.

¹⁹ The methodology of calculating the indices of contacts and engagement is given above, in the chapter on the relations with North African countries.

2007	6,5	3	9,5
2008	9,75	3	12,75
2009	1	5	6
2010	8	5	13
2011	10	5	15
2012	0	8	8
January – October 2013	7	Inapplicable	Inapplicable
Sum Total from 2002 to 2012	74,25	44	118,25
Annual average from 2002 to 2012	1,65	Inapplicable	Inapplicable

The relations with the countries of sub-Saharan Africa were characterised by essential fluctuations. The reasons are described in the chapter *Overview of Belarus - Africa Relations and Their Chronology*. The contacts in the military and defence technology field were only a few, which makes it pointless to calculate the corresponding quotient.

Belarus' Relations with Certain Regions and States

Specific Traits of Belarus' Relations with North African Countries

Libya was Belarus' first and the most stable partner in North Africa. The contacts with Egypt were far behind the relations with Libya. Official Cairo was not obviously enthusiastic enough about initiatives coming from Minsk. According to Taćciana Jaśiejčyk, 'the cause of the Egyptian government's passive attitude could be both inertia of the Egyptian political elite and their pro-American orientation'.²⁰

Active contacts with Sudan were initiated in 2003 and continued till the end of 2007. No serious contacts with Sudan were identified afterwards, even if arms trade went on, albeit on a lesser scale. The share of military and defence technology aspects in Belarus – Sudan relations was markedly higher than that of the average contacts with developing countries. The military and defence technology components were present in nearly 50% of all contacts with Sudan. One can only guess what the true causes of their rapid decline were, but in any case Belarus – Sudan relations were yet another example of unstable bilateral relations between states, even though they differed in many aspects from the cases with Iraq and Peru. Such unstable contacts quickly disintegrate when the countries' highest officials for some reason lose political will to maintain them.

The research findings have also mapped contacts with Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, which were, however, of not much importance in the given timespan.

Libya

A long tradition of Soviet – Libyan contacts facilitated the establishment of relations between Belarus and Libya, and their strong military component contributed to the abovementioned militaristic nature of Belarus – Libya cooperation. The two countries established diplomatic relations relatively late, namely in August 1996.

Year 2000 was marked by intensive efforts to establish good contacts with Libya. In June 2000 Belarus' government delegation headed by the Deputy Prime Minister – Foreign Minister paid a visit to Libya. In July 2000 a Libyan delegation led by the GPCO Secretary for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation returned the visit. In late October – early November 2000 an official Belarusian delegation headed by President Lukashenka visited Libya. In September 2001 a Libyan delegation with General Aboubaker Yunis Jaber, Secretary of the Provisional General Committee for Defence at its head made an official visit to Belarus.²¹

However, the contacts established between Belarus and Libya did not yield the expected outcome. Despite all the contacts and the presence of Libyan and Belarusian embassies in Minsk and Tripoli, there were years when Belarus did less trade with Libya than with Algeria or Morocco, even though there were no Belarusian diplomatic missions in the latter two countries and the political contacts were just minimal.

Belarus failed to reinforce the first positive outcome of cooperation with Libya in 1998–1999 because Libya's standing in the international relations had changed. Belarus may have hoped for potential large-scale cooperation as long as Libya found itself in international isolation, but these prospects rapidly dwindled when Tripoli began to overcome it. After the UN and the USA lifted

²⁰ Евсейчик Т.В., О некоторых аспектах ближневосточной политики Республики Беларусь // Белорусский журнал международного права и международных отношений 2004 – № 4. http://evolutio.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=717&Itemid=55 Date of access: 08/09/2009.

²¹ О вручении верительных грамот послами Индии, Ливии и Таджикистана, Министерство иностранных дел Республики Беларусь, <http://www.mfa.gov.by/ru/press/news/2004-01-09-1.html> Date of access: 01/07/2009.

their sanctions, Libya was removed from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism and established good relations with European states, Belarus lost much of its weight for Tripoli.

Thus, the economic relations with Libya were kept on a relatively small scale throughout the analysed timespan. The highest figures of trade, \$19.2 million, almost exclusively made up of Belarusian exports, were achieved in 2008.²² A year before, in 2007, the trade between Belarus and Libya was only \$4 million,²³ and in 2009 it fell by nearly 100%. The downward trend continued in 2010 and in 2011 Belarus and Libya actually ceased all trade. According to official Belarusian sources, most of Belarusian exports to Libya consisted of automotive machinery, fertilisers, tyres, amines, furniture, food and petrochemicals.²⁴

During the analysed period Belarus and Libya had quite regular but not very active contacts as compared to other developing countries. They took place on a level no higher than ministerial. When Gaddafi visited Belarus in 2008, it was his first visit to the post-Soviet states after 1985; apart from Belarus, he also went to Russia and Ukraine. At his meeting with Islamic religious leaders of Russia, Belarus and Central Asia in Moscow the Libyan ruler referred to them all as 'indigenous citizens of a great Russia',²⁵ – a telling detail that gives a clear idea of how he viewed the post-Soviet countries. During his visit to Minsk Gaddafi did not make any resounding statements, unlike his Belarusian counterpart, who declared that 'Belarus and Libya do not differ in their approaches to major issues of world order. Both you and we are convinced that the world should be multipolar and this is a principle that determines the existence of any system, as it must rest on many supports.'²⁶

Lukashenka, however, obviously did not have a friendly relationship with Gaddafi like the one he had with Hugo Chávez, to give just one example. This posed a serious problem in the relations with Libya, as the country's system of government was centred on Gaddafi's person.

The Republic of South Africa

Belarus established diplomatic relations with South Africa on 4 March 1993. For the last two years efforts have been made to give them fresh impetus, since the Belarusian foreign policy ran into difficulties in dealing with other traditional partners, including those in Africa.

The present Belarusian Ambassador to South Africa Andrej Maičan speaks of 'a wide gap in our bilateral relations in 2008–2011, when Belarus did not have its plenipotentiary representative in South Africa'.²⁷ The fact vividly proves that Belarus gave little importance to its relations with South Africa in those years.

According to Mr Maičan, 'the main vector of Belarus' cooperation with African countries on a bilateral basis is the expanding of Belarusian exports'.²⁸ In 2012 Belarus' trade with South Africa amounted to \$32.6 million, a growth of 59.1% as compared to the previous year. The exports made up \$24.54 million, which was 67% more than in 2011. The trade surplus was about \$16.6 million, about twice as much as in 2011. At the same time, the Belarusian exports to South Africa

²² Беларусь и Ливия намерены создать СП по сборке тракторов, Интерфакс, 29.10.09, <http://www.interfax.by/news/belarus/62689> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

²³ Беларусь-Ливия: большая дружба – мизерный товарооборот, Белорусский партизан, 28.10.2009, <http://www.belaruspartizan.org/bp-forte/?page=100&backPage=19&news=50459&newsPage=0> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

²⁴ Торгово-экономическое сотрудничество, Посольство Республики Беларусь в Ливии http://libya.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/trade_economic/ Date of access: 12/12/2013

²⁵ Визит Муаммара Каддафи в Россию, Белоруссию и Украину (31 октября - 6 ноября 2008), <http://www.kaddafi.ru/sng2008.html> Date of access: 12/12/2013

²⁶ Игорь Кольченко, Расширение перспективы, СБ, 04.11.2008, http://sb.by/post/rasshirenie_perspektivy/fontszie/11/ Date of access: 12/12/2013

²⁷ Ирина Судас, Капитан дальнего плаванья, Народная газета, 03.08.2013, http://www.ng.by/ru/issues?art_id=78056 Date of access: 12/12/2013

²⁸ Ирина Судас, Капитан дальнего плаванья, Народная газета, 03.08.2013, http://www.ng.by/ru/issues?art_id=78056 Date of access: 12/12/2013

in 2012 consisted of only three types of products, namely giant tyres (\$9.33 million), potash fertilisers (\$8.47 million) and BelAZ dump trucks (\$5.79 million).

It has to be said that Belarus and South Africa have been negotiating a potential setting up of an assembly plant of Belarusian automotive machinery for several years already.²⁹

As for the priorities in the nearby region, at present special emphasis is being made on entering the Mozambican market. For example, in 2012 a joint venture BelAfrica Ltd was set up there, with Promagroleasing JSC as the Belarusian partner.

At the same time, the embassy with its limited resources objectively cannot work towards developing relations in all the areas. 'Considering that the embassy is in charge of Belarus' contacts with four African countries and in view of our modest human resources (the Ambassador and two diplomats) and finances we are trying to establish contacts steadily, focusing on top priorities and covering each of the four countries in turn.' In practice it looked that Mozambique was a priority during the first six months of 2013 and until then priority had been given to Namibia.³⁰

Nigeria

Belarus and Nigeria established diplomatic relations on 3 August 1992. However, there were actually no bilateral contacts for a long time and even in the 2010s they cannot seem to be very active, taking place on the margins of some international forums.

For example, during the G-15 summit in May 2010 in Tehran the First Deputy Prime Minister Uladzimir Siamaška had a meeting with the Nigerian Foreign Minister Aliyu Idi Hong. In September 2011 during the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade, Belarusian Foreign Minister Siarhiej Martynaŭ had a meeting with his Nigerian counterpart Viola Onwuliri. In May 2012 during the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Sharm el-Sheikh Deputy Foreign Minister Siarhiej Aliejnik had a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Nigeria Viola Onwuliri.³¹ For the last year the relations have gained momentum.

Trade is placed at the core of Belarus' economic relations with Nigeria, the total Belarusian export to this country characterised by an ebb and flow pattern. In 2012 it was more than four times lower than in 2011. In recent years Belarusian exports consisted of potash and nitrogen fertilisers, as well as petrochemicals, printed matter and instrumentation products. In addition, cooperation in aircraft procurement has been quite successful (*see the section on military and defence technology cooperation*) and the two sides are exploring possibilities for assembling tractors (*see the section on machine building*). Interestingly enough, the imports from Nigeria amounted to pretty high figures for an African country: they made up over \$22 million in 2012 and about \$20 million in 2012, Indian rubber being the chief item of import.

In other areas Homiel-based Siejsmatechnika engineering company signed a contract with a Nigerian firm New Fields Oil and Gas Services Ltd on the distribution of Siejsmatechnika's products, namely oil upstream equipment.³² In his interview to the Nigerian media the Belarusian Ambassador said that a Belarusian company MH Matory could carry out a \$200 million worth project to provide electricity to the states of Adamawa, Bauchi and Gombe.³³

²⁹ О визите в ЮАР, Министерство иностранных дел Республики Беларусь, 29.10.2011, http://www.mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/dc0121f3785cd493.html Date of access: 21/12/2013.

³⁰ Ирина Судас, Капитан дальнего плаванья, Народная газета, 03.08.2013, http://www.ng.by/ru/issues?art_id=78056 Date of access: 21/12/2013.

³¹ О торгово-экономических отношениях Республики Беларусь и Федеративной Республики Нигерия // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Федеративной Республике Нигерия, http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/trade_economic/ Date of access: 21/12/2013.

³² Belarusian Seismotekhnika, Nigerian company ink distribution agreement, BelTA, 03.12.2012, <http://news.belta.by/en/news/econom?id=700648> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

³³ Belarus Establishes Embassy In Nigeria, Leadership.ng, 24/06/2012,

The Belarusian Embassy in Abuja also represents Belarus' interests actually in all of West Africa: Cameroon, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal and Togo. The figures of trade with Ghana and Ivory Coast are relatively high and commensurate with those of Belarus – Nigeria trade. Considering that there the embassy staff consists of just three diplomats and the ambassador, consistent fruitful work with all these countries looks unlikely. It should be pointed out that so far there have been no high level contacts with Ghana or Ivory Coast, which has a negative impact on the legal base for cooperation and further complicates the work of the Belarusian Embassy in Abuja.

Ethiopia

Belarus and Ethiopia established diplomatic relations in May 1994. In May 2013 the Belarusian government took a decision to open an embassy in Ethiopia the same year. When the embassy in Addis Ababa begins functioning, it will give a new impetus to cooperation with the member states of the African Union, whose HQ is located in the Ethiopian capital. According to Belarusian officials, 'the embassy in Ethiopia is expected to coordinate cooperation with all the African Union member states'.³⁴

Some earlier events were a factor in absence of cooperation in the 2000s and the 2010s. In July 2005, following the Ethiopian general elections and the violence triggered by their outcome, eight Ethiopian pilots taking a six-month training course in Belarus appealed to the Belarusian government for political asylum. Some sources reported that those individuals had been trained to operate Su-27 fighter aircraft.³⁵ In any case, their training was an essential step that Meles Zenawi's government had taken to strengthen Ethiopia's military power, as its armed forces hardly had any pilots trained to fly Soviet jet fighters in the second half of the 2000s.

When the Belarusian authorities denied them political asylum, the Ethiopian pilots moved to a third country. The Belarusian government did not place any obstacles in their way and probably even helped them, because it would be hard to imagine that the Ethiopian diaspora, in spite of their triumphant reports, had an opportunity to withdraw the pilots from Belarus.³⁶ Interestingly enough, official Minsk refused to turn over the pilots or allow Ethiopian representatives to transfer them to their home country, whereas Djibouti did turn over three helicopter pilots who had fled Ethiopia. This resulted in worsened relations with Ethiopia virtually until Zenawi died in August 2012 and absence of serious economic cooperation. Thus, in 2008 г. trade with Ethiopia was \$2.2 million, of which \$1.8 million was Belarusian export to Ethiopia. The trade with Ethiopia has not reached any meaningful figures ever since.³⁷

In October 2012 the Belarusian and Ethiopian ambassadors to Moscow signed a protocol on cooperation between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Belarus and Ethiopia. The Belarusian Ambassador Ihar Pietryšenka pointed out that the protocol, being the first-ever document in Belarus – Ethiopia relations, laid the foundations for creating a legal base of bilateral relations; their goal was cooperation in all spheres, primarily in economy.³⁸

http://www.leadership.ng/nga/articles/28098/2012/06/24/belarus_establishes_embassy_nigeria.html

Date of access: 21/12/2013.

³⁴ Belarus to open its embassy in Ethiopia in 2013, BelTA, 19.10.2012,

<http://news.belta.by/en/news/society?id=696563> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

³⁵ Ethiopia loses her last MiG-21 pilot to exile, Ethiomedia, 04.08.2005,

http://ethiounited.blogspot.de/2007_04_08_archive.html Date of access: 21/12/2013.

³⁶ "8 Ethiopian pilots safe out of Belarus," Ethiomedia, July 31, 2005,

<http://www.ethiomedia.com/fastpress/report.html> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

³⁷ Specialised publications of the Belarusian National Committee for Statistics on foreign trade in 2011, 2012 and 2013 do not report any trade with Ethiopia, which shows that it was meagre or non-existent.

³⁸ Внешнеполитические ведомства Беларуси и Эфиопии подписали протокол о сотрудничестве, БелТА, 19 Октябрь 2012, http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/politics/Vneshnepoliticheskie-vedomstva-Belorussi-i-Efipi-ii-podpisali-protokol-o-sotrudnichestve_i_612356.html Date of access: 21/12/2013.

Ghana

Belarus and Ghana established diplomatic relations on 5 June 1992; however, there have been no reports of any political contacts on a more or less high level. In 2010 г. a delegation of Ghanaian businessmen visited Belarus. In 2010, 2011 and 2012 the Presidential Aide for Special Missions Viktor Šejman visited Ghana as a member of mixed delegations.

Thus, in November 2011 Viktor Šejman went to Ghana as a member of a delegation that included Russian and Polish investors. According to the Ghana News Agency,³⁹ Viktor Šejman headed the delegation, which was a sign of Belarus' efforts to employ the format of multilateral cooperation with African countries on a larger scale.

Šejman said that Belarus' main goal was to create joint ventures in Ghana; in addition, Minsk was interested in exporting fertilisers and agricultural machinery. Some media reported that Belarus would like to build a service centre for MI-17 helicopters in Ghana; it would provide maintenance and repairs for all African countries; this issue was discussed with the Defence Minister of Ghana Joseph Smith. It was Šejman's third visit to Ghana as a member of an international delegation. In August 2010 during a similar visit of a Belarus – Russia delegation Šejman announced that Belarus and Russia intended to invest \$1 billion into Ghana's oil and gas industry.

The figures of trade between Belarus and Ghana are quite high but subject to strong oscillations. In 2011 the trade amounted to \$56 million, of which Belarusian export made up \$33 million, with a surplus of over \$7 million. By contrast, in 2012 the total trade was less than \$40 million, with Belarusian export over \$18 million and trade deficit of nearly \$3 million. A specific feature of Belarus' trade with Ghana, unlike other states in the region, is that steel products make up a considerable share of Belarusian exports: \$8.6 million in 2010, \$25.6 million in 2011 and \$11.2 million in 2012. The rest of Belarusian exports consist mainly of potash fertilisers, automotive machinery and tyres.

Zimbabwe

Belarus' relations with Zimbabwe are a good example of cautiousness and a highly pragmatic approach displayed by official Minsk in its foreign policy. The two states established diplomatic relations on 16 April 1992. On 10–14 August 2009 a Belarusian delegation headed by the First Deputy Minister of Industry visited Zimbabwe.

In April 2011 the Second Vice President of Zimbabwe John Nkomo visited Belarus. It was the first visit of a high-ranking Zimbabwean government official to Minsk, after a minor Zimbabwean minister visited Belarus in 2001.

Lukashenka referred to the the Second Vice President's visit as 'historic'. 'You have a very advantageous geographic and strategic position in Africa,' he said. 'We hope that cooperation with your country allows us to strengthen cooperation with other African states, using your territory as a foothold.'⁴⁰

Prime Minister Michail Miašnikovič was more reserved in his speech. He pointed out that it was necessary to form a legal base for the bilateral relations: 'large-scale cooperation requires specific agreements in the fields of trade and economy, education, exploration and exploitation of resources, etc.' Clearly hinting at Zimbabwe's well-known problems with fulfilling agreements and payment for deliveries, he stressed that 'the issues of developing sound payment schemes

³⁹ 10-member delegation of investors in Ghana, Ghana News Agency, 8th November 2011, <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/details/Social/10-member-delegation-of-investors-in-Ghana/?ci=4&ai=35346> Date of access: 11/11/2011.

⁴⁰ Беларусь увидела в Зимбабве плацдарм, Ежедневник, 09.04.2011, http://www.ej.by/news/politics/2011/04/09/belarus_ovidela_v_zimbabve_platsdarm.html Date of access: 21/12/2013.

between the two states so as to minimise risks in mutual settlements are no less important'.⁴¹

Yet, the importance of this one-shot contact with Zimbabwe should not be overestimated, particularly if we consider the Belarusian export there, combined with actually zero import from Zimbabwe to Belarus: \$0.8 million in 2009, \$2.6 million in 2010, \$2.3 million in 2011 and \$5.5 million in 2012.

The Belarusian government was well aware of the practical details related to cooperation with Zimbabwe, such as the country's small size, geographic remoteness, economic problems and lack of financial resources. So it can be concluded that the Belarusian leadership viewed contacts with Mugabe's Zimbabwe regime as an opportunity to demonstrate its opposition to Great Britain and the USA at the time of confrontation with the West, rather than a serious attempt to seek new partners.

This was exemplified by the developments around deliveries of tractors to Zimbabwe. The contract was signed during the Second Vice President John Nkomo's visit to Belarus, but in the end Minsk Tractor Plant cancelled the contract. 'It turned out that the Zimbabwean side did not have a sound financial footing!' explained a spokesperson for the plant. 'It had been decided to negotiate the details of the delivery through Belzniešpramservis Co. They went there several times to discuss the financial issues. And the Central Bank of Zimbabwe proposed to make payment in local currency.'⁴²

⁴¹ М.Мясникович высоко оценивает потенциал сотрудничества Беларуси и Зимбабве, Совет министров Республики Беларусь, 07.04.2011, <http://www.government.by/ru/content/3709> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁴² Тамара Савіч, Пастаўкі беларускіх трактароў ў Зімбабвэ "накрыліся", Еўрапейскае радыё для Беларусі, 31.01.2013, <http://euroradio.fm/report/pastauki-belaruskih-traktarou-u-zimbabwe-nakrylisya> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

Economic Aspects

General Overview

Compared to other regions, Africa poses more serious problems for Belarusian companies. They involve legal guarantees for businesses, presence of the required infrastructure and solvency of local partners and customers. For this reason the economic ties are mainly limited to trade and just a few assembly plants.

On the positive side, Belarusian companies point out that the projects of assembly plants in sub-Saharan Africa 'may yield very high profits, perhaps even higher than in the Russian Federation or Kazakhstan. This is despite the fact that the logistics-related costs are far from small. This is facilitated by the absence of strict requirements concerning local manufacturing content in African countries.'⁴³

It should be mentioned that Minsk is seeking opportunities to establish relations with African countries not only through bilateral contacts. For example, the Development Bank of the Republic of Belarus signed a partnership agreement with the Eastern and Southern African Trade and Development Bank (PTA Bank) on the general terms of export loan granting and risk coverage for Belarusian companies for the purposes of exports and investment into eighteen Eastern and Southern African states.⁴⁴

Trade

In 2012 Belarus' total trade with African countries amounted to \$475.6 million, of which \$288.9 million was export. The figure equals to 0.63% of Belarus' total export and may seem minuscule at first sight, but what matters is the trade surplus of over \$102 million. On top of that, it was achieved in the situation of limited contacts with African government officials, with only four Belarusian embassies for the whole of the world's largest continent – in Pretoria, Abouja, Cairo and Tripoli. Moreover, it should be remembered that the one in Abouja had just started working and the one in Tripoli remains very restricted in its activities due to the continuing instability in the state.

For purposes of comparison: Belarus' trade with South America equalled \$1,884.4 million, with \$1,128.4 million worth of export. At the same time, the contacts with this much smaller region have been much more intensive and taken place on a higher level. Besides, three Belarusian embassies and a consulate general have been functioning in South America for years.

Table 5. Trade with major partners in Africa (\$ mln)

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012
<u>Ghana</u>				
export:	16,5	16,0	33,2	18,4
import:	31,1	35,5	25,8	21,4
<u>Egypt</u>				
export:	66,5	47,7	45,2	77,7
import:	13,0	15,4	19,0	19,4
<u>Ivory Coast</u>				
export:				

⁴³ «Чувство ностальгии» поможет белорусской технике завоевать рынки многих африканских стран, Beltechnika.by, <http://beltehnika.com/news/afrikanskiy-rinok.html> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁴⁴ La Biélorussie signe un accord de coopération avec PTA Bank pour exporter dans 18 pays africains, Agence Ecofin, 21 octobre 2013, <http://www.agenceecofin.com/commerce/2110-14401-la-bielorussie-signe-un-accord-de-cooperation-avec-pta-bank-pour-exporter-dans-18-pays-africains> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

import:	8,4 2,7	32,8 32,3	24,2 48,1	16,3 30,6
<u>Morocco</u>				
export:	2,6	1,7	8,9	8,3
import:	16,3	18,6	62,9	40,5
<u>Nigeria</u>				
export:	28	41,5	74,7	17,6
import:	0,1	12,1	22,6	19,3
<u>South Africa</u>				
export:	6,1	16,6	14,7	24,5
import:	9,1	8,3	6,1	8,1

As expert Andrej Jelisiejeŭ has pointed out, fertilisers make up a major part of Belarusian exports to some African countries. For example, their export to Ivory Coast made up 49.6% in 2011 and 98.8% in 2012. The corresponding figures for Mali were 75.4% in 2011 and 98.1% in 2012 and for Nigeria 16.2% and 75%, respectively. The significant share of fertilisers in Belarus' exports to a number of African countries looks quite logical, considering the role played by agriculture there.

At the same time Belarusian exports to some other African countries mainly consist of steel products, which made up 93% of export to Tunisia in 2011 and 99.7% in 2012. For Ghana the corresponding figures were 77.1% in 2011 and 60.9% in 2012.⁴⁵

Belarus' export to Egypt has the most versatile structure. In 2012 г. it amounted to \$77.68 million and included 89 types of products. The major ones included semi-finished unalloyed steel products (\$32.39 million), tractors (\$22.08 million), conventional engines (\$5.6 million), spare parts for automotive machinery (\$3.69 million), polycarboxylic acids (\$3.82 million), filament yarn (\$1.68 million) and tyres (\$1.17 million).

Machine Building

North Africa

In November 1998 Minsk Automobile Plant launched its assembly facility in Egypt in partnership with Sakr Group. In April 2000 г. an assembly plant for tractors of Minsk Tactor Plant was launched in Egypt.⁴⁶ In early 2013 there were already three assembly facilities of Minsk Tractor Plant in this country.⁴⁷ The requirement of guaranteed payment determines some specific traits of this production. Minsk Tractor Plant delivers full sets of tractor parts payable in advance to be assembled in Egypt. Yet, according to a spokesperson for the plant, 'There are not many tractors of this kind in Egypt. The chief delivery items are assembled "Belarus" tractors. For the last two or three years Egyptians have been opting for machinery assembled in Belarus, rather than exported from Belarus to be assembled in Egypt.'⁴⁸ Egypt is the biggest buyer of Belarusian tractors – over 2,000 of them were delivered there in 2012.

⁴⁵ Андрей Елисеев, Беларусь и развивающиеся страны: порочная монопольность, Наше мнение, <http://nmnby.eu/by-2012ru/yelisseev12-ru.html> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁴⁶ Сегодня отмечается 10-летний юбилей установления дипломатических отношений между Беларусью и Египтом, АФН, 01.02.2002, <http://afn.by/news/i/15048> Date of access: 21/07/2009.

⁴⁷ Беларусь в 2012 году существенно нарастила экспорт в страны Африки и Ближнего Востока, БелТА, 12 Январь 2013, http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/politics/Belarus-v-2012-godu-suschestvenno-narastila-eksport-v-strany-Afriki-i-Blizhnego-Vostoka_i_620819.html Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁴⁸ Елена Толкачева, Сборка белорусских тракторов в Египте работает в штатном режиме, Комсомольская правда в Белоруссии, 1 Февраля 2011, <http://www.kp.by/daily/25630/796215/> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

At the same time during a visit of the First Deputy General Manager of Minsk Tractor Plant Siarhiej Pachomčyk to Egypt in October 2013 he discussed the issues of increasing the export of assembled tractors and sets of tractor parts for assembly to Egypt, as well as the possibilities of export of Belarusian tractors to Oman.⁴⁹ Apart from that, the possibilities of launching an assembly facility for Belarusian tractors in Sudan are being explored at present.⁵⁰

In 2011 an assembly facility for Belarusian tractors was launched in Algeria.⁵¹

Ethiopia

An assembly plant for Belarusian tractors has been operating in Ethiopia since 1984. However, between 1989 and 1999 its annual output was only about 120 tractors. In March 2007 Minsk Tractor Plant and its Ethiopian partners signed a Memorandum on Mutual Understanding towards Cooperation. Later a spokesperson for Minsk Tractor Plant announced that 'during the negotiations in April 2011 the Ethiopian partners confirmed that they were interested in modernising the existing assembly facilities for 'Belarus' tractors in their country and increasing the deliveries of Minsk Tractor Plant products up to 12,000 annually in the future.' In particular, the Ethiopian partners said they were prepared to sell Belarusian tractors not only on the Ethiopian market but also in other countries, such as Kenya and Djibouti.⁵²

The joint venture in Ethiopia, according to Ihar Pietryšenka, 'must provide a footing for supplying the whole of the African continent not only with tractors but also with a full range of attachments.' 'The products of Minsk Tractor Plant can meet this goal, as they have a reputation for quality, are available at reasonable prices and we are completely happy with them, said Kasahun Dender Melese. He stated that the Ethiopian side was interested in raising the output of Belarusian tractors assembled in Ethiopia.'⁵³

Nigeria

When Minsk Tractor Plant and its Nigerian partners signed a contract for the delivery of forty 'Belarus' tractors in November 2010, it was the initial step in entering the Nigerian market. According to a spokesperson for Minsk Tractor Plant, Nigeria has good prospects as a market for Belarusian tractors, 'however, considering end customers' low payment capability, support from international funds and banks is needed so as to guarantee export operations in Nigeria financially.' For example, Minsk Tractor Plant thinks that its participation in procurement process through UN agencies opens a window of opportunity to enter the Nigerian market.⁵⁴

According to official information, in 2012 the embassy 'began to exploring the possibilities of carrying out a project to create an assembly facility for Belarusian tractors in Nigeria with an initial capacity of up to a thousand tractors per year.'⁵⁵ The Belarusian Ambassador to Nigeria

⁴⁹ О визите делегации РУП «МТЗ» в Египет, Посольство Республики Беларусь в Арабской Республике Египет, <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/news/c7172eeb1f4f3feb.html> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁵⁰ Беларусь рассматривает возможность создания сборочного производства тракторов в Судане, Интерфакс, 22.05.13, <http://www.interfax.by/news/belarus/130379> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁵¹ Александр Алексин, Успехи накануне перемен, Белорусы и рынок, №15 (999), 16-22 апреля 2012 г., <http://belmarket.by/ru/171/60/13625> Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁵² Беларусь и страны Африки: потенциал сотрудничества, Национальный центр маркетинга и конъюнктуры http://export.by/resources/izdaniya_i_publikacii/belarus_i_strani_afriki_potencial_sotrudnichestva.html Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁵³ Foreign ministries of Belarus, Ethiopia ink cooperation protocol, BelTA, 19.10.2012, <http://news.belta.by/en/news/politics?id=696592> Date of access: 20/10/2012.

⁵⁴ Беларусь и страны Африки: потенциал сотрудничества, Национальный центр маркетинга и конъюнктуры http://export.by/resources/izdaniya_i_publikacii/belarus_i_strani_afriki_potencial_sotrudnichestva.html Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁵⁵ О торгово-экономических отношениях Республики Беларусь и Федеративной Республики Нигерия //

announced that it was intended to establish partnership with the northern state of Bauchi with a view to launching an assembly facility for Belarusian tractors. 'Bauchi already has a plant for this purpose. It is located very favourably. As they are going to be produced locally, the tractors will be affordable.'⁵⁶ It is supposed that they will be sold not only in Nigeria but in the whole of West Africa, including Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast and Mali.⁵⁷

Посольство Республики Беларусь в Федеративной Республике Нигерия,
http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/trade_economic/ Date of access: 21/12/2013.

⁵⁶ Belarus Establishes Embassy In Nigeria, Leadership.ng, 24/06/2012,
http://www.leadership.ng/nga/articles/28098/2012/06/24/belarus_establishes_embassy_nigeria.html
Date of access: 20/10/2012.

⁵⁷ О торгово-экономических отношениях Республики Беларусь и Федеративной Республики Нигерия //
Посольство Республики Беларусь в Федеративной Республике Нигерия,
http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/trade_economic/ Date of access: 21/12/2013.

Military and Defence Technology Cooperation

Africa accounted for a considerable share of Belarus' arms trade in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Arms were mainly delivered to crisis areas and politically unstable states, which did not, however, lead to much protest from the international community.

North Africa

In 2003 Belarus started cooperation with Sudan in the field of defence technologies. As a result, Sudan alongside Azerbaijan still remains the leading and best established buyer of weapons from Belarus. Since 2004 this cooperation has occasionally come into focus of international human rights organisations. For example, in 2012 Amnesty International claimed that Belarus together with China and Russia provided Sudan with arms to wage war in Darfur.

In 2013 some experts tried to take these accusations to the UN level. An opinion was aired – unsupported by hard evidence – that the Sudanese government used Belarusian weapons, namely air-to-ground missiles and Su-25 planes, to fight the insurgents in Darfur.⁵⁸ Yet, there was no ban on arms deliveries to Sudan at the time, provided the arms were not used then in Darfur. Minsk received from Khartoum written guarantees that the arms purchased from Belarus would not be used in Darfur.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Accusations against the Belarusian government related to its activities in sub-Saharan Africa have been regularly levelled since the late 1990s. However, so far hard evidence of violations by official Minsk has not been produced. Yet, in 2004 and 2011 Belarus was implicated in scandals related to the political tensions in Ivory Coast, though in both cases the Belarusian government probably did not breach the international law.

Late in February 2011 the UN accused Minsk of violating the UN arms embargo imposed on Ivory Coast, as Belarus had allegedly delivered there combat helicopters. Yet, just a couple days later the UN Undersecretary for Peacekeeping Operations revoked the accusations and apologised to Belarus's representative to the UN.

In November 2004 the Defence Minister of France claimed that nine French soldiers had been killed in Ivory Coast during a bombing attack on a French base by the Armed Forces of Ivory Coast, whose planes were flown by Belarusian military specialists. The Ministry of Defence of Ivory Coast refuted Paris's statement. The Belarusian Ministry of Defence declared that it had not sent its officers to Ivory Coast and could not be held responsible for actions of private individuals. The Belarusian service of Radio Liberty interviewed one of the officers who had fought in Ivory Coast. He claimed he had with him an intergovernmental agreement on military assistance between Belarus and Ivory Coast, in accordance with which Belarusian specialists had been deployed there.⁵⁹ However, the agreement was not published.

In 2010 WikiLeaks published a despatch of the American Embassy in Paris of February 2006 containing revelations of the ex-Minister of the Internal of Togo François Boko, who was at the time seeking asylum in France. Boko claimed that 'it was Belarusian specialists who were involved in the incident and the planes in question had been delivered via Togo'. Boko said he had arrested nine Belarusian citizens – pilots and maintenance technicians, and reported the incident to the

⁵⁸ Алег Грузьдзіловіч. Беларускія съяды суданскай вайны, Радыё Свабода, 05.03.2013, <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24920302.html> Date of access:17/03/2013.

⁵⁹ Беларускія снайпэры ў Лібіі? 06.09.2011, Радыё Свабода, <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24319252.html> Date of access: 20/10/2012.

French Embassy. The Belarusian stayed under arrest for about two weeks, until the French side proposed to 'drop' the whole thing.⁶⁰ Most of the independent Belarusian media reprinted the information without any giving any critical analysis of Boko's words, particularly in the light of his personal circumstances or without looking into the legal aspects of the case. The probable absence of legal grounds to persecute Belarusian specialists who had been employed by the Ivory government was the most likely reason why Paris did not press the charges.

In March 2007 two planes of the Belarusian airline Transaviaexport were shot down in Somalia. Eleven Belarusian pilots were killed. Whatever some media may have speculated,⁶¹ no facts were published to disprove the official version, which claimed that the first plane had been performing a flight to deliver a cargo for the peacekeeping mission of the African Union in Somalia at the request of the UN Security Council. In fact the only piece of evidence that might have contradicted it was the alleged presence of military equipment on board the plane. But it does not necessarily testify to some illegal activities, as the military equipment could have been shipped from the peacekeeping mission. Transaviaexport was at the time the official air carrier for the UN and delivered cargoes all over the world.⁶²

Ethiopian sources once quoted anonymous military analysts who said that in the 2000s there were 'extensive military contracts worth over \$100 million between the two governments in Addis and Minsk'.⁶³ It has been impossible to find any hard evidence to support the claim.

In recent years Belarus had made active efforts to establish cooperation in the field of defence technologies with South Africa and the nearby region. For example, Belarusian companies were represented at the exhibition *Aerospace and Defense'2012* in September 2012 in South Africa.

Nigeria

According to some sources, the cooperation between Belarus and Nigeria in the military field began in 2003.⁶⁴ An intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in the field of defence technologies was signed in June 2010. Its details were not made public, which is just common practice for this kind of documents.⁶⁵

During his visit to Nigeria in October 2011 the General Director of Belśpieczenieśtechnika General Siarhiej Barysionak announced the intention to expand cooperation in the defence field. At the same time he said that the Belarusian government was awaiting a response from the Nigerian government.⁶⁶ At his meeting with Gen Barysionak the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defence Linus Awute 'suggested that the relationship between both countries should not start and end with commerce only but in seeing each other as partners in military development'. Gen Barysionak announced that Belarus was going to open a helicopter maintenance facility in Nigeria.

⁶⁰ WikiLeaks: французскую авиабазу бамбавалі беларускія лётчыкі, Telegraf.by, 13.12.2010, http://telegraf.by/2010/12/wikileaks_francuzskuju_avjabazu_bambaval_belaruskja_letchik Date of access: 20/10/2012.

⁶¹ See for example: Петр Сидореня, Наши летчики под флагом ООН халтурят на сомалийские группировки? «Белорусский партизан», 13/03/2007 <http://www.belaruspartisan.org/politic/109900/> - Date of access: 20/10/2012.

⁶² Только белорусы соглашаются летать под пулями? Елена Спасок, Naviny.by, 30.03.2007, http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2007/03/30/ic_articles_116_150304 Date of access: 20/10/2012.

⁶³ "8 Ethiopian pilots safe out of Belarus," Ethiomedia, July 31, 2005,

<http://www.ethiomedia.com/fastpress/report.html> Date of access: 20/10/2012.

⁶⁴ Belarus to open embassy, helicopter maintenance facility in Nigeria, defenceWeb, 14 October 2011, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?Itemid=111&catid=56:diplomacy-a-peace&id=20069:belarus-to-open-embassy-helicopter-maintenance-facility-in-nigeria&option=com_content&view=article Date of access: 20/10/2012.

⁶⁵ Belarus, Nigeria sign agreement on military and technical cooperation, Naviny.by, 18.06.2010, http://naviny.by/rubrics/abroad/2010/06/18/ic_news_259_333344/ Date of access: 20/10/2012.

⁶⁶ Nigeria, Republic of Belarus to strengthen bilateral relations in defence. Nanngronline.com, October 06, 2011 <http://www.nanngronline.com/section/defencesecurity/nigeria-republic-of-belarus-to-strengthen-bilateral-relations-in-defence> Date of access: 20/10/2012.

At least in the early 2010s the Belarusian Belśpiecźnieštechnika provided maintenance for Nigerian Mi-35 attack helicopters, while Nigeria sent their pilots and engineers to be trained in Belarus, among other countries. Abuja bought most of its Mi helicopters from Kyiv and Moscow. Only two Mi-24b helicopters were bought in 2010 from Belarus.

Belśpiecźnieštechnika alongside Alenia Aeronautica and AgustaWestland provided maintenance for the aircraft fleet of the Nigerian army. In particular, Belśpiecźnieštechnika did the maintenance of Mi helicopters for Group 97 for Special Operations in Port Harcourt. Port Harcourt is the capital of the State of Rivers, probably the main oil producing region in Nigeria and a hotbed of guerrilla warfare.⁶⁷ When the Belarusian Ambassador to Nigeria Viačaslaŭ Biaskosty declared that 'his country was prepared to provide technical assistance to Nigeria to fight terrorists that posed a threat to the country', his words should be interpreted in this particular context. 'We are ready for all types of cooperation,' Viačaslaŭ Biaskosty went on to clarify, 'and are already trying to bolster bilateral cooperation between the Ministries of Internal Affairs and the police of both countries. Here we can speak of technical cooperation and training courses.'⁶⁸

When the Nigerian government sent dozens of former guerrillas from the Niger River delta to study for a university degree to Belarus alongside South Africa and Italy in 2012, this step opened one more field of cooperation.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Belarus to open embassy, helicopter maintenance facility in Nigeria, defenceWeb, 14 October 2011, http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?Itemid=111&catid=56:diplomacy-a-peace&id=20069:belarus-to-open-embassy-helicopter-maintenance-facility-in-nigeria&option=com_content&view=article Date of access: 20/10/2012.

⁶⁸ Innocent Odoh, Belarus can assist Nigeria fight terrorism – Envoy, Blueprintng.com, Jun 26, 2012 <http://blueprintng.com/2012/06/belarus-can-assist-nigeria-fight-terrorism-envoy/> Date of access: 20/10/2012.

⁶⁹ Nosa Osula-Aituamen Ex-Nigerian Militants Head To Belarus, Italy For University Education, Nigeriamasterweb.com, 04/11/12 <http://nigeriamasterweb.com/blog/index.php/2012/04/11/ex-nigerian-militants-head-to-belarus-italy-for-university-education>; 164 ex-militants move to Belarus for varsity education, Punchng.com, January 31, 2012 <http://www.punchng.com/news/164-ex-militants-move-to-belarus-for-varsity-education/> Date of access: 20/10/2012.

Summary

Belarus' policy towards African countries is marked by a pragmatic approach. Aware of the limited resources the Belarusian government and businesses have at their disposal, Belarusian economic agents are cautious in cooperation with African countries. This invariably leads to limited relations with Africa, which probably remains the weakest vector of the Belarusian foreign policy as a whole. After all, there are objective reasons, like the current situation in many of these countries.

In an attempt to avoid risks, Minsk seeks a few separate countries to rely on in less familiar regions. It can be concluded that in Africa the Belarusian leadership staked on Libya as a possible outpost for promoting Belarusian interests not only in North Africa, but also in the regions of sub-Saharan Africa.

The Belarusian policies towards Africa to a large extent followed the old Soviet patterns but were by no means restricted to them. In the 2000s and 2010s Minsk did cooperate first and foremost with two regions, namely North Africa, where the USSR had had close links with Libya, Algeria and until a certain moment with Egypt, and Southern Africa, where the USSR had been heavily involved in Angola, Mozambique and Namibia. However, Minsk did not show interest in the poorer countries of Central Africa and other regions of the African continent. An attempt to establish good relations with Ethiopia – another country that had had close ties with the USSR – ended up in a complete failure. Minsk got involved in Ethiopian internal confrontation and had to give up the idea of developing the relations with this country for years, until Ethiopia had a new ruler in the autumn of 2012.

In the late 2000s and early 2010s Belarus had to rethink its policies towards the developing world on the whole and Africa in particular. One the one hand, some of the key partners were weakened, dramatically changed their policies or were ousted from power, like in Iraq and Libya. On the other, Belarus is adjusting to the reality of the unipolar world and trying to avoid confrontation with the West on issues that are of no vital importance for the Belarusian leadership. Among such minor issues are the relations with the opponents of the West in the developing world.

There have been numerous speculations about alleged instances of selling Belarusian weapons to conflict areas and 'Belarusian dogs of war' fighting there. However, an objective analysis gives no grounds to speak of Belarus breaching the international law in its relations with African countries. The related accusations against the Belarusian government were not caused by its actions that might have threatened international peace and security. They were inspired by the political tensions in Belarus or by its obvious competition with western and post-Soviet states in the military and defence technology field or other reasons.

In the early 2010s Minsk was forced to formulate a new policy towards Africa, in fact shifting its priorities. Until then a clear priority had been the relations with North Africa, with Libya and to a lesser extent South Africa as key partners in the continent. At present Belarus has no choice but to await stabilisation in North Africa, meanwhile developing its relations with other African regions. Among them are Southern Africa, where Minsk is trying to extend its contacts to South Africa's neighbouring countries, such as Mozambique and Angola, Western Africa, with Nigeria and Ghana as prospective partners, and Eastern Africa with Ethiopia as a potential partner.

At the same time, political contacts may facilitate economic cooperation, first and foremost by providing a legal base and administrative support, but in some cases Belarus' economic and foreign policy ties do not overlap geographically. Thus, Belarus had minimal political contacts with Egypt, Morocco and Nigeria and had practically no political contacts at all with Ghana and Ivory Coast. However, it has active trade with all of these countries; on top of that, trade with Egypt is characterised by a great diversity of exports. And vice versa, the contacts with Zimbabwe actually led to nothing. The political ties with Libya under Gaddafi's regime may have yielded some

economic benefits, but they were certainly incommensurate with the effort.

It should be pointed out that the Belarusian Foreign Ministry clearly understands the role of the African vector in Belarus' foreign policy and probably does not overestimate it. The relations with Africa give a chance to get some revenues but they cannot have any dramatic influence on the situation. So it is no surprise that only limited resources are allocated to the African vector. The new developments in Belarus' policies towards Africa, such as the opening of the embassy in Nigeria and the proposed opening of an embassy in Ethiopia, signal that a bit more resources will be allocated, since Belarus has certainly not exhausted the potential for cooperation with African states. Yet, hardly anyone can have an idea that they can compensate for the gaps in relations with other countries. The ties with complement the relations with other regions of the world, rather than substitute for them.