



DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2022-22-1-77-93

Research article / Научная статья

The Eurasian Component in the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus, 1991—2021

Aliaksandr V. Tsikhamirau  

Belarus State University, Minsk, Belarus

 tihomirow@list.ru

Abstract. The article discloses the essence and features of the Eurasian component in the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus. The scientific novelty of the article lies in revealing the role and place of the Eurasian component in the foreign policy strategy of the Belarusian state at two levels — the Eurasian space as a whole and individual states belonging to this space. Using the tools of neoclassical realism, linking the implementation of the foreign policy process with the state of development of the state, and the theory of foreign policy analysis, the author comes to the conclusion about the increasing importance of the Eurasian component in the foreign policy of Belarus in the second half of the 1990s and the first two decades of the 21st century. According to the author, the course for the development of cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the Eurasian states was predetermined by its economic interests, although a certain role in its implementation was played by political guidelines of the Belarusian leadership (maintaining stability in the Belarusian state, reinforcing the thesis of the effectiveness of a multi-vector foreign policy, expanding the range of communication in the world arena). A specific feature of the Belarusian Eurasian policy was the absence of a fundamental conceptualization of actions in this direction and the prevalence of situational solutions in building relations with individual Eurasian states. Until the early 2020s, the Eurasian region was considered by the Belarusian authorities and experts mainly in functional and geographical terms, without being perceived as a distinctive civilizational association. At the current stage of development of the Belarusian state, its key partners in Eurasia are Russia, relations with which are being built within the framework of integration associations (the Union State, the EAEU, the CSTO), and China, which is promoting the Belt and Road initiative. However, conceptually, the issue of Belarus' geostrategic positioning in Eurasia still needs to be finalized.

Key words: Republic of Belarus, Eurasian States, foreign policy priority, foreign trade and investment, Eurasian integration, Belt and Road Initiative

For citation: Tsikhamirau, A. V. (2022). The Eurasian component in the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus, 1991—2021. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 22(1), 77—93. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2022-22-1-77-93>

© Tsikhamirau A.V., 2022




This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Евразийский компонент во внешней политике Республики Беларусь в 1991—2021 гг.

А.В. Тихомиров  

Белорусский государственный университет, Минск, Республика Беларусь
 tihomirow@list.ru

Аннотация. Раскрываются сущность и особенности евразийского компонента во внешней политике Республики Беларусь. Научная новизна исследования обусловлена выявлением роли и места евразийского компонента во внешнеполитической стратегии белорусского государства на двух уровнях — евразийского пространства как такового и отдельных государств, принадлежащих к этому пространству. Используя инструментарий неоклассического реализма, увязывающего осуществление внешнеполитического процесса с состоянием развития государства, и теории внешнеполитического анализа, автор приходит к выводу о повышении значимости евразийского компонента во внешней политике Белоруссии во второй половине 1990-х гг. и первых двух десятилетиях XXI в. По мнению автора, курс на развитие сотрудничества Республики Беларусь с государствами Евразии предопределялся экономическими интересами, хотя определенную роль в его осуществлении сыграли политические установки белорусского руководства (сохранение стабильности в белорусском государстве, подкрепление тезиса об эффективности многовекторной внешней политики, расширение диапазона общения на мировой арене). Специфической чертой белорусской евразийской политики являлось отсутствие фундаментальной концептуальной проработки действий на этом направлении и превалирование ситуативных решений при выстраивании отношений с отдельными государствами Евразии. Вплоть до начала 2020-х гг. Евразийский регион рассматривался белорусскими властями и экспертами преимущественно функционально-географически, без восприятия в качестве самобытного цивилизационного объединения. На современном этапе развития белорусского государства его ключевыми партнерами в Евразии являются Россия, отношения с которой выстраиваются в рамках интеграционных объединений (Союзного государства, ЕАЭС, Организации Договора о коллективной безопасности (ОДКБ)), и Китай, который продвигает инициативу «Пояса и пути». Однако в концептуальном плане вопрос геостратегического позиционирования Белоруссии в Евразии все еще нуждается в доработке.

Ключевые слова: Республика Беларусь, государства Евразии, внешнеполитический приоритет, внешняя торговля и инвестиции, евразийская интеграция, инициатива «Пояса и пути»

Для цитирования: Тихомиров А. В. Евразийский компонент во внешней политике Республики Беларусь в 1991—2021 гг. // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Международные отношения. 2022. Т. 22, № 1. С. 77—93. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2022-22-1-77-93>

Introduction

The relevance of the research is predetermined by the increasing importance of Asian states (primarily China and India) in modern international relations, as well as Russia's aspiration to reinforce itself as an independent center of power on the world stage and in the Eurasian space. These trends have an impact on the policy of the Republic of Belarus, which is geographically located in the eastern part of Europe, but has traditionally been influenced by the West and the East.

The aim of this study is to assess the place and role of the Eurasian component in Belarus'

foreign policy from its entry into the world arena as an independent state in 1991 until the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century. With this goal in mind, the research has the following objectives: to identify Belarus' interests in the Eurasian space, to reveal the peculiarities of the Belarusian state's policy towards the countries of the region in the 1990s—2010s, to assess the significance of the Eurasian states for Belarus and to determine the prospects of relations with these states.

The object of the study is the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus, the subject — the policy of the Belarusian state towards Eurasian states in 1991—2021.

For the purposes of the defined objectives two main theories will be applied — neoclassical realism, which links the implementation of the foreign policy process to the state of development, as well as the theory of foreign policy analysis. The role and place of the Eurasian component in the foreign policy strategy of the Belarusian state are assessed at two levels — the Eurasian space as a whole and individual states belonging to this space. Descriptive analysis, content and event analysis, as well as quantitative analysis techniques were heavily used.

The sources for the study include official statements and speeches by the president of the Republic of Belarus, political parties and social movements of Belarus; documents published in collections on the history of Belarusian foreign policy; analytical information of Belarusian embassies in Eurasia; interviews and memoirs of Belarusian diplomats; current media information; statistical collections on foreign trade of Belarus.

The problems related to the strategy of the Republic of Belarus in the Eurasian space have been reflected in a number of scientific articles and monographs published in Belarus and abroad. The focus has been on Belarusian-Russian relations (Astakhova, 2014; Borishpolets & Chernyavsky, 2012; Orlova & Andreeva, 2018; Petrovskaya, 2018; Pimoshenko, 2001; Rusakovich, 2019; Snapkouski, 2009; Chetverikova, 2016; Eberhardt, 2008; Timmermann, 2002). Researchers who dealt with the relevant issues put a special focus on the conditions, peculiarities and prospects for the development of Belarusian-Russian integration.

In the 2000s and 2010s, scientific publications appeared which looked at the forms and results of Belarus' cooperation with individual Asian states. Researchers have been most interested in the interaction of the Belarusian state with Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, China, Turkey, the Arab states of the Middle East, and Israel (Aleksandrovich, 2008; Dudik, 2007; Ganbarov, 2014; Matsel, 2002; 2004; Rupakova, 2013; Sivilas &

Evseychik, 2009; Turarbekova, 2020; Filipyuk, 2005; Shadurskij, 2012; 2014; 2018; Shykh, 2017; Chasnouski & Khudayberdiyeva, 2016).

In the 2010s, the main aspects of Belarus' participation in Eurasian integration processes and its attitude to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative were mostly analyzed (Dostanko & Rubo, 2021; Kuzmina, 2018; Kosov & Yurchak, 2021).

However, despite the existence of a large number of scientific publications dedicated to Belarus' actions in the Eurasian space, the Eurasian component as such in its foreign policy has not been singled out and analyzed as a complex phenomenon. As a rule, the relations of the Republic of Belarus with individual Eurasian states have been considered in a fragmented manner, in the context of the implementation of the multi-vector policy of the Belarusian state. The corresponding approach was typical even for fundamental research on the foreign policy of Belarus in the conditions of independence (Garnet & Legvold, 1998; Godin, 2014; Ulakhovich, 2009; Shadurskij, 2010; Sharapo, 2012; Czachor, 2011; Mironowicz, 2011). This article aims to fill the existing knowledge gap on Belarus' policy towards the Eurasian space in the 1990s and early 2020s.

Formation of the Eurasian Component in the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus in 1992—2000

In the early 1990s, the Eurasian component was not an important foreign policy priority for Belarus, either in theory or in practice. Belarusian politicians and experts proceeded from the assumption that Belarus is part of Europe and a subject of European politics. The Asian component was seen as an auxiliary element of Belarusian foreign policy. The draft concept of foreign policy prepared by the Belarusian Foreign Ministry in late 1992 singled out China, India and the Republic of Korea among the Asian countries of interest to Belarus (Matsel, 2002, p. 183). In the first half of the 1990s, there were only two Belarusian

embassies in Asia (outside the CIS) — in China and Israel.

The issue of relations with Russia was at the center of the public debate on foreign policy priorities, which took place in Belarus between 1991 and 1994. Supporters of the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF), who linked the future of Belarus with Europe, perceived Russia as an Asian state. In January 1994, BPF leader Z. Pazniak called the Russians “a patchwork nation without a defined national territory, intermingled with Finno-Ugric, Turkic, Mongolian and other enclaves, dispersed in the Siberian and Asian colonies.”¹

The political opponents of the BPF saw Russia as a Slavic state, close to Belarus culturally and historically. Head of the Belarusian government V. Kebich justified the necessity of maintaining close ties with Russia by the necessity of normal functioning of the Belarusian economy (within the USSR it was Russia that was the main consumer of Belarusian products and supplier of energy resources to Belarus).² In 1993 he achieved the accession of Belarus to the CIS collective security system by securing the support of the parliamentary majority. In the autumn of 1993, V. Kebich expressed his willingness to introduce the Russian rouble as the monetary unit of Belarus, but was unable to implement this decision.

Alexandre Lukashenko, who won the first presidential election in Belarus in summer 1994, also supported the policy of rapprochement with Russia. The process of Russia — Belarus rapprochement started in 1995. In April 1996, the Russia — Belarus Community was established, and in 1997, the Union of Belarus and Russia was created. In December 1999, the leaders of Belarus and Russia signed the Treaty

on the Union State. The treaty was accompanied by an Action Programme focused on the creation of a Union State by the mid-2000s.

Between 1995—2000, trade between Belarus and Russia increased from USD 5 billion to USD 9.3 billion.³ In the late 1990s, Russia accounted for 84.4% of Belarus’ exports and 92.3% of its imports.⁴ The lack of a fully-fledged state border has facilitated the movement of citizens of the two countries and contributed to strengthening ties between Belarus and cities and regions of the Russian Federation. It was also important that Belarus was able to purchase Russian energy resources (primarily oil and natural gas) on preferential terms.

The stable work of Belarusian enterprises focused on cooperation with Russia provided support for integration in the Belarusian society. On May 14, 1995, the majority of Belarusian citizens approved the course of deepening economic integration with Russia at the referendum initiated by A. Lukashenko (about 82.4% of voters supported integration;⁵ the referendum results were a convincing victory for the Belarusian president over the supporters of the BPF). In the autumn of 1996, Russia contributed to the reformatting of the political system in Belarus by supporting Lukashenko during his confrontation with part of the parliamentary corps and the leadership of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus.

Focusing on the integration of the Slavic nations, the Belarusian leadership did not attach

¹ Pozniak Z. On Russian Imperialism and its dangers // *Narodnaya Gazeta* [Позняк З. О русском империализме и его опасности // Народная газета]. January 15—17, 1994. P. 2. (In Russian).

² Kebich V. Exit from the Crisis is in an Alliance with Russia // *Pravda* [Кебич В. Выход из кризиса — в союзе с Россией // Правда]. April 29, 1994. P. 1—2. (In Russian).

³ Foreign Trade of the Republic of Belarus : Statistical collection. 1995—2000 [Внешняя торговля Республики Беларусь : статистический сборник. 1995—2000]. Minsk, 2001. P. 32, 34. (In Russian).

⁴ *Ibid.* P. 33, 35.

⁵ On the Results of Voting at the Republican Referendum on May 14, 1995 // Central Commission of the Republic of Belarus for Elections and National Referendums [Аб выніках галасавання на рэспубліканскім рэферэндуме 14 мая 1995 года // Цэнтральная камісія Рэспублікі Беларусь па выбарам і правядзенню рэспубліканскіх референдумов]. URL: <https://rec.gov.by/uploads/folderForLinks/archive-referenda-1995-itogi.pdf> (accessed: 12.02.2021). (In Belarusian).

much importance to the Eurasian component in the CIS space. The initiative of the President of Kazakhstan on the creation of the Eurasian Union, put forward in 1994, was met with no enthusiasm in Minsk.⁶

However, the refusal to support the Eurasian Union project was not an indication of the unwillingness of the Belarusian side to develop relations with the Asian states of the CIS. In the second half of the 1990s, official Minsk maintained friendly contacts with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. On 29 March 1996, Belarus, together with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia, signed the Treaty on Deepening Integration in the Economic and Humanitarian Fields. In 2000, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) was created on the basis of this association.

In 1995, Belarus began to expand its engagement with Asian states outside the CIS. Initially, China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, India and Iran were identified as the most promising states in the region.⁷

In 1995, the Belarusian president paid his first visit to China and in 1996 to Turkey (on July 24, 1996, the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Turkey signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, with Turkey being the first “far away” Asian state with which Belarus had signed a legal document of this kind). In 1995—1996, high-level Belarusian governmental delegations visited Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In 1995 the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in Japan was opened. The foreign ministries maintained a dialogue with Vietnam and Mongolia.

The complication of Belarus’ relations with the countries of the “collective West” at the end of 1996 was accompanied by a further increase

in activity in the Asian direction. This activity was explained by the need to find new markets for Belarusian products, although geopolitical arguments were occasionally made. Thus, in March 1997, A. Lukashenko announced the possibility of creating a Minsk — Moscow — Beijing axis in a response to the expansion of NATO to the East.⁸

In 1997—2000, the President of the Republic of Belarus paid visits to China, Vietnam, the Republic of Korea, India, Iran, Syria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Israel and the Palestinian National Authority. The same years saw visits of the head of the Belarusian government to Singapore, members of the Belarusian government to Indonesia, Iraq, Singapore and Thailand, the head of the presidential administration to Japan, Belarusian parliamentarians to Israel, India, Iran and China. Belarusian foreign ministers visited Bahrain, India, Iran, Kuwait, Malaysia, Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, UAE, while representatives of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry visited China and Mongolia. Until the late 1990s, Belarus was visited by the leaders of Vietnam and Lebanon, representatives of the governments of Vietnam, India, Kuwait and Nepal, the head of the Syrian Foreign Ministry and the First Deputy Foreign Minister of Iraq.

The visits were accompanied by a statement of the closeness of the approaches of Belarus and Asian states in relation to the prospects for world development, the formation of political and legal foundations for cooperation and the definition of prospects for its development. The strengthening of ties with Asian countries was facilitated by the entry of Belarus into the Non-Aligned Movement in 1998.

The Belarusian diplomatic presence in the Asian region expanded. In 1997, embassies of

⁶ Zhdanko B. Belarusian President Sits at the “Round Table” with Other Republics // *Zviazda* [Жданко. В. Беларускі прэзідэнт упершыню сеў за “круглы стол” з адзінаццацю іншымі рэспублікамі // *Звязда*]. October 22, 1994. P. 1. (In Belarusian).

⁷ Step by Step to the East // *Belorusskaya Gazeta* [Шаг за шагом на Восток // *Белорусская газета*]. October 30, 1995. P. 25. (In Russian).

⁸ Volkova M., Karamanov Yu. Alexander Lukashenko Tried Once Again to Seize the Integration Initiative from Boris Yeltsin // *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [Волкова М., Караманов Ю. Александр Лукашенко попытался в очередной раз перехватить у Бориса Ельцина интеграционную инициативу // *Независимая газета*]. March 13, 1997. P. 1. (In Russian).

the Republic of Belarus appeared in Vietnam, Iran, South Korea, Turkey, and in 1998 in India and Syria.

Between 1995 and 2000, trade with Asia increased from USD 563 million to USD 874.2 million. Moreover, at that time, Belarus exported more of its products to Asian countries than imported goods from the countries of the region.⁹ But by the end of the 1990s Asian countries accounted for only 5.5% of Belarus' total foreign trade in goods (the share of the EU countries in Belarus' foreign trade was about 25% at that time).¹⁰

The Eurasian Component in the Foreign Policy of Belarus in 2001—2021

In 2001 the Republic of Belarus finally overcame the economic and political difficulties of the 1990s and moved to a new stage of existence, which A. Lukashenko in April 2001 described as the stage of “a strong state capable of successfully solving complex problems of the country's economic and social development.”¹¹ In the first half of the 2000s, the Belarusian leadership formulated new foreign policy guidelines. The essence of the new approach was to substantiate the idea of preserving Belarus as a sovereign and independent European state, politically equidistant from Russia and the EU and preserving freedom of action on the world stage, including in the Eurasian space.¹²

By implementing foreign policy in a functional-geographical context, the Belarusian

leadership has shown no interest in developing its theoretical basis. The perception of Eurasia was affected accordingly. Minsk preferred to build relations with individual countries of the Eurasian space, refraining from recognizing Eurasianism as a distinct cultural and civilizational component of the system of international relations.

The corresponding approach was manifested even in the expert environment. Speaking about Eurasian integration, Belarusian researchers acknowledged the existence of historical ties between the countries that are members of integration associations, pointed to their institutional belonging to the eastern matrix of social structure and the use of the Russian language as the language of interethnic communication. However, the emphasis was placed on the need to develop the economic component in integration associations (conclusion of agreements on preferential and free trade, conclusion of economic agreements on behalf of the union with third countries, etc.).¹³

Often the Eurasian component has been replaced by the idea of priority the preservation of the Slavic Union as the basis of policy in the Eurasian space. An article by the Belarusian political scientist V. Shimov, published in April 2020, was quite revealing in this respect. The author questioned the productivity of the Eurasian concept, pointing out that it undermines the Russian-centricity of the post-Soviet space by stimulating a surge of nationalism and pan-ideas among other peoples (Turks, Finno-Ugric, etc.) and pushing Russia to implement policies beyond its resource, economic and moral capabilities. From the point of view of V. Shimov, Eurasianism reduced the importance of Belarusian-Russian relations, depriving them of the exclusivity inherent in the Slavic union. The scholar called for foreign policy to prioritize the consolidation of the

⁹ Foreign trade of the Republic of Belarus : Statistical collection. 1995—2000 [Внешняя торговля Республики Беларусь : статистический сборник. 1995—2000]. Minsk, 2001. P. 57. (In Russian).

¹⁰ Ibid. P. 56—57.

¹¹ “Belarus Has Finally Formalized Its Statehood and Acquired Real Sovereignty” // Respublika [Беларусь окончательно оформила свою государственность и приобрела реальный суверенитет» // Рэспубліка]. April 11, 2001. P. 2. (In Russian).

¹² Foreign Policy of Belarus. Collection of Documents and Materials [Знешняя палітыка Беларусі. Зборнік дакументаў і матэрыялаў]. Vol. 9. Minsk : BDU publ., 2013. P. 426, 431. (In Belarusian).

¹³ Turlay I. S. Prerequisites for the Development of Eurasian Integration // Belaruskaya Dumka [Турлай И. С. Предпосылки развития евразийской интеграции // Беларуская думка]. 2000. No. 1. P. 64—67. (In Russian).

Russian world as a space united by the Russian language and culture, and the solution of its internal problems, rather than the realization of globalist and pan-Continental mega-projects.¹⁴

The above-mentioned attitudes determined the specifics of Belarus' participation in Eurasian integration processes. The Belarus counterparty has not abandoned the Union State and EurAsEC projects. In 2002, A. Lukashenko supported the creation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), in 2010 — the Customs Union, in 2014 took part in the establishment of the EAEU. However, activities in the Eurasian integration associations were focused mainly on extracting economic dividends (facilitated access to the resources and markets of the countries participating in integration associations) and maintaining military-political stability of the Belarusian state.

The change of approach to integration has effectively put the process of Belarusian-Russian rapprochement on hold. The Belarus counterparty refused to accept the Constitutional Act of the Union State, spoke out against the formation of the Union Parliament and the use of the Russian rouble as the currency of the Union State, curtailed the creation of joint financial and industrial groups, and limited the possibilities of Russian political and informational influence on the Belarusian society. In 2013, the leadership of the Republic of Belarus rejected a proposal to strengthen the political component in the activities of the EAEU.¹⁵

¹⁴ Shimov V. Eurasianism and Integration in the post-Soviet Space // *Western Rus' [Шимов В. Евразийство и интеграция на постсоветском пространстве // Западная Русь]*. April 28, 2020. URL: <https://zapadrus.su/rusmir/pubru/2118-evrazijstvo-i-integratsiya-na-postsovetskom-prostranstve.html> (accessed: 28.04.2020). (In Russian).

¹⁵ Lukashenko Sees no Need for a Single Currency and Political Superstructure in the EEU [Лукашенко не видит необходимости в единой валюте и политической надстройке в ЕЭС] // *Tengrinews.kz*. 02.10.2013. URL: <https://tengrinews.kz/sng/lukashenko-vidit-neobhodimosti-edinoy-valyute-politicheskoy-242805/> (accessed: 16.09.2020). (In Russian).

The revision of the integration policy was accompanied by a number of conflicts related to the conditions for obtaining Russian energy resources, access of Belarusian products to the Russian market and Russian capital to the Belarusian economy. However, in the end, conflict situations were resolved on the basis of a compromise.

In the 2000s and 2010s, Russia remained Belarus' key partner in the security, economic, transport and energy sectors. In 2019, the volume of Belarusian-Russian trade reached USD 35.7 billion in 2019.¹⁶ Even though it dropped to USD 29.5 billion amid the 2020 pandemic, Russia accounted for 47.9% of the total volume of foreign trade in goods, 45.2% of exports (in 2019 — 41.5%) and 50.2% of imports (in 2019 — 55.8%).¹⁷ In trade with Russia, Belarus maintained a negative balance, steadily exceeding USD 4 billion in the second half of the 2010s. In 2019, the negative balance exceeded USD 8 billion, in 2020 decreased to USD 3.3 billion.¹⁸ Belarus imported mostly oil and gas from Russia, and exported to Russia mainly foodstuffs and sophisticated technical products.¹⁹

At the end of 2018, Russian Prime Minister D. Medvedev urged the Belarus counterparty to speed up the process of Belarusian-Russian rapprochement. The response to this call was A. Lukashenko's statement about the inviolability of Belarusian sovereignty and his unwillingness to adopt Russian legal norms and carry out privatization on the Russian model. The Belarusian leadership once again linked the deepening of integration with Russia with the

¹⁶ Foreign Trade of the Republic of Belarus, 2020 : Statistical Collection [Внешняя торговля Республики Беларусь, 2020 : статистический сборник]. Minsk, 2021. P. 59, 64. (In Russian).

¹⁷ On the Results of Belarus' Foreign Trade with Russia in 2020 // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Russian Federation [Об итогах внешней торговли Беларуси с Россией в 2020 году // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Российской Федерации]. 2021. URL: https://russia.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/trade/ (accessed: 12.09.2021). (In Russian).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

provision of “compensatory support” from the Russian side.²⁰

In September 2019, the heads of the Belarusian and Russian governments endorsed the Action Program for Deepening Integration, approving a list of 31 road maps. Initially, it was supposed to complete the process of agreeing roadmaps by 2021.²¹ However, due to various reasons, this did not happen within the specified period.

In addition to the cooperation with Russia within the CIS during the 2000s — 2010s, the cooperation between Belarus and Kazakhstan looked the most advanced and was greatly facilitated by the joint membership in the Eurasian integration associations. The volume of Belarusian-Kazakh trade in goods increased from USD 36.8 to USD 920 million in 2019.²² In 2020, it amounted to USD 847.9 million.²³ In trade with Kazakhstan, the Republic of Belarus maintained a positive balance, the volume of which in 2019 reached USD 610 million, and in 2020 — USD 646.3 million.²⁴ The structure of

Belarusian exports to Kazakhstan resembled that of exports to Russia: in 2020, Kazakhstan exported mostly tractors, combines, furniture, food and medicines. Imports from Kazakhstan were dominated by hard coal, petroleum products, cotton fiber, rails and flat-rolled alloy steel.²⁵

In the second half of the 2000s, cooperation between Belarus and Azerbaijan expanded. At the turn of the 2000s and 2010s, it was brought to the level of strategic partnership. In 2011, Azerbaijani oil began to flow to Belarus, supplementing oil supplies from Russia. Trade turnover with Azerbaijan in 2001—2019 increased from USD 8.5 to USD 307.8 million. In 2020 it amounted to USD 447.1 million.²⁶ Until 2020, Belarus exported more goods to Azerbaijan (the basis of exports were products of engineering, oil refining, woodworking, food products) than it imported goods from there. However, in 2020, the trade balance changed in favor of Azerbaijan, which was associated with an increase in purchases of Azerbaijani oil (the volume of the negative balance amounted to USD 66.9 million).²⁷

Relations between Belarus and Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan maintained a stable character. Relations with Kyrgyzstan were somewhat overshadowed by the official Minsk granting political asylum to the President of this country, K. Bakiyev who

²⁰ Meeting with Representatives of the Russian Media Community // President of the Republic of Belarus [Встреча с представителями российского медийного сообщества // Президент Республики Беларусь]. December 14, 2018. URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/vstrecha-s-predstaviteljami-rossijskogo-medijnogo-soobschestva-20062 (accessed: 23.05.2021). (In Russian).

²¹ Mihovich S. Semashko Commented on the Process of Agreeing Roadmaps for Integration // SB Belarus Today [Михович С. Семашко прокомментировал ход согласования дорожных карт по интеграции // СБ-Беларусь сегодня]. November 29, 2019. URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/semashko-prokommentiroval-khod-soglasovaniya-dorozhnykh-kart-po-integratsii.html> (accessed: 02.09.2020). (In Russian).

²² Foreign Trade of the Republic of Belarus : Statistical Collection [Внешняя торговля Республики Беларусь : статистический сборник]. Minsk, 2020. P. 58, 63. (In Russian). See also: (Aleksandrovich, 2008, p. 7).

²³ Trade and Economic Cooperation // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of Kazakhstan [Торгово-экономическое сотрудничество // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Республике Казахстан]. 2021. URL: https://kazakhstan.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/trade_economic/ (accessed: 20.09.2021). (In Russian).

²⁴ See: Foreign Trade in the Republic of Belarus : Statistical Collection [Внешняя торговля Республики Беларусь : статистический сборник]. Minsk, 2020. P. 58,

63. (In Russian); Trade and Economic Cooperation // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of Kazakhstan [Торгово-экономическое сотрудничество // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Республике Казахстан]. 2021. URL: https://kazakhstan.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/trade_economic/ (accessed: 20.09.2021). (In Russian).

²⁵ Trade and Economic Cooperation // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of Kazakhstan [Торгово-экономическое сотрудничество // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Республике Казахстан]. 2021. URL: https://kazakhstan.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/trade_economic/ (accessed: 20.09.2021). (In Russian).

²⁶ Trade and Economic Relations // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of Azerbaijan [Торгово-экономические отношения // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Азербайджанской Республике]. 2021. URL: https://azerbaijan.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/trade_economic/ (accessed: 20.09.2021). (In Russian).

²⁷ Ibid.

was overthrown in 2010. However, this did not lead to a significant deterioration in Belarusian-Kyrgyz relations.

The real problem was that the Belarusian side was not able to significantly expand the volume of trade with these countries. In 2019, the total volume of trade with them amounted to USD 366.7 million with exports of USD 297.9 million and imports of USD 68.8 million.²⁸

Belarus continued to expand political dialogue and economic cooperation with Asian states outside the CIS. In public speeches and policy statements by the head of the Belarusian state, the corresponding direction has invariably been included among the important components of the multi-vector foreign policy of Belarus.

The relations with China were a key element of Belarus' strategy in the Asian track. During the first two decades of the 21st century the President of the Republic of Belarus made ten visits to this country (in 2001, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019). In public speeches, he assessed China as a rapidly developing superpower, without which it is impossible to solve any issue in the world.²⁹

²⁸ Foreign Trade of the Republic of Belarus : Statistical Collection [Внешняя торговля Республики Беларусь : статистический сборник]. Minsk, 2020. P. 58—59, 63—65. (In Russian).

²⁹ See: Message of the President to the Belarusian people and the National Assembly // President of the Republic of Belarus [Послание Президента белорусскому народу и Национальному собранию // Президент Республики Беларусь]. April 22, 2014. (In Russian). URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/aleksandr-lukashenko-obraschaetsja-s-ezhegodnym-poslaniem-k-belorusskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-sobraniju-8549 (accessed: 15.08.2021); Message to the Belarusian People and the National Assembly // President of the Republic of Belarus [Послание к белорусскому народу и Национальному собранию // Президент Республики Беларусь]. April 21, 2017. (In Russian). URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/ezhegodnoe-poslanie-k-belorusskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-sobraniju-16059 (accessed: 15.08.2021); Message to the Belarusian People and the National Assembly // President of the Republic of Belarus [Послание белорусскому народу и Национальному собранию // Президент Республики Беларусь]. April 24, 2018. (In Russian). URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/poslanie-k-belorusskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-sobraniju-18594 (accessed: 01.09.2021).

In December 2005, Belarusian-Chinese relations were described for the first time as relations of “comprehensive development and strategic cooperation.”³⁰ In 2015, the term “comprehensive strategic partnership” was used to characterize them, in 2016 — “trustful comprehensive strategic partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation.”³¹

On May 10, 2015, during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Minsk, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the People's Republic of China was signed (it entered into force in September 2016). The course towards developing cooperation with China was supported by a special Directive approved by the President of the Republic of Belarus on August 31, 2015.

The Belarusian-Chinese dialogue developed at various levels. In 2001 and 2015 Belarus was visited by the highest state leaders of the PRC. The parliaments of the two countries, the ministries of foreign affairs, defense, etc. actively and effectively cooperated. In 2014, the Belarusian-Chinese Intergovernmental Committee for Cooperation was launched. By the end of the 2010s, the Republic of Belarus opened two consulates general in China: in Shanghai (2009) and Guangzhou (2018).

The share of China in the Belarusian foreign trade has been steadily increasing. In 2000, Belarusian-Chinese trade totaled USD 197.8 million. In 2019 — USD 2,159.9 million, in 2019 — USD 4,480.9 million, in 2020 —

³⁰ Belarusian-Chinese Relations in the Memoirs of Belarusian Ambassadors: On the 25th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations [Белорусско-китайские отношения в воспоминаниях белорусских послов: к 25-летию установления дипломатических отношений]. Minsk : Zviazda, 2017. P. 124. (In Russian).

³¹ On political relations between Belarus and China // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the People's Republic of China [О политических отношениях Беларуси и Китая // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Китайской Народной Республике]. 2019. URL: <http://china.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral/political/> (accessed: 01.08.2020). (In Russian).

USD 4,457.1 million.³² At the end of 2020, China became the second trading partner of Belarus after Russia.³³ However, after 2006 Belarusian-Chinese trade was marked by a clear imbalance towards China. In the late 2010s, the volume of the negative balance in trade between Belarus and China approached USD 3 billion.³⁴

In the 2000s, the PRC provided assistance in the modernization of Minsk CHPP-2 and CHPP-5, Belarusian cement plants, and the construction of the Beijing Hotel in Minsk. The most large-scale investment project was the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park “Great Stone,” built in the Smolevichi district of the Minsk region (25 km from Minsk) in 2015.

It should be stressed that the Chinese loans were linked to the purchase of Chinese equipment, materials, licenses, etc. However, the Belarusian leadership believed that the effect of cooperation exceeded the costs.³⁵

In the 2010s, official Minsk showed interest in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, evaluating it as a new model of interstate

cooperation built on the principles of support and joint development.³⁶ From 2014 to 2020, the volume of rail container traffic through the territory of Belarus along the route China — Europe — China increased 14 times.³⁷ The Belarusian leadership also supported the idea of linking the EAEU with the Belt and Road initiative. In 2016, A. Lukashenko instructed the Belarusian government to take an active position on this issue.³⁸

Positive changes were observed in relations between Belarus and India. In the 21st century this country was visited twice by the President of the Republic of Belarus (in 2007 and 2017) and the leaders of the Belarusian government (in 2002 and 2012), three times by the heads of the Belarusian Foreign Ministry (in 2002, 2007 and 2015). In 2015, the first visit to Belarus of the President of the Republic of India took place. The same year, A. Lukashenko met with the Prime Minister of India during the summits of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS in Ufa. Cooperation between Belarusian and Indian parliamentarians continued to expand.

³² See: Foreign Trade in the Republic of Belarus : Statistical Collection [Внешняя торговля Республики Беларусь : статистический сборник]. Minsk, 2017. P. 50, 56. (In Russian); Belarus in Figures : Statistical Handbook [Республика Беларусь в цифрах : статистический справочник]. Minsk, 2019. P. 62. (In Russian).

³³ Trade and Economic Cooperation // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the People’s Republic of China [Торгово-экономическое сотрудничество // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Китайской Народной Республике]. 2021. URL: <https://china.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral/trade/> (accessed: 20.09.2021). (In Russian).

³⁴ Belarus in Figures : Statistical Handbook [Республика Беларусь в цифрах : статистический справочник]. Minsk, 2019. P. 62. (In Russian).

³⁵ See: Address to the Belarusian People and the National Assembly // President of the Republic of Belarus [Послание белорусскому народу и Национальному собранию // Президент Республики Беларусь]. April 24, 2018. (In Russian). URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/poslanie-k-belorusskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-sobraniju-18594 (accessed: 01.09.2020); Address to the Belarusian People and the National Assembly // President of the Republic of Belarus [Послание белорусскому народу и Национальному собранию // Президент Республики Беларусь]. April 19, 2019. (In Russian). URL: <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/poslanie-belorusskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-sobraniju-20903> (accessed: 20.08.2020).

³⁶ Address to the Belarusian People and the National Assembly // President of the Republic of Belarus [Послание белорусскому народу и Национальному собранию // Президент Республики Беларусь]. April 24, 2018. (In Russian). URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/poslanie-k-belorusskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-sobraniju-18594 (accessed: 01.09.2020).

³⁷ Lukashenko Counts on Liberalization of Trade in Services and Sees Prospects in China’s Online Marketplaces // Belarusian Telegraph Agency (BelTA) [Лукашенко рассчитывает на либерализацию торговли услугами и видит перспективы в онлайн-площадках Китая // Белорусское телеграфное агентство (БелТА)]. September 2, 2021. URL: <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-rasschityvaet-na-liberalizatsiju-torgovli-uslugami-i-vidit-perspektivy-v-onlajn-ploschadkah-458081-2021/> (accessed: 02.09.2021). (In Russian).

³⁸ Annual Address to the Belarusian People and the National Assembly // President of the Republic of Belarus [Обращение с ежегодным Посланием к белорусскому народу и Национальному собранию // Президент Республики Беларусь]. April 21, 2016. URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/aleksandr-lukashenko-21-aprelja-obratitsja-s-ezhegodnym-poslaniem-k-belorusskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-13517 (accessed: 15.09.2020). (In Russian).

Whereas in 2000 Belarusian-Indian trade turnover amounted to only USD 55.4 million, then in 2019 it increased to USD 569.6 million, and in 2020 it reached USD 575.7 million.³⁹ In trade with India, Belarus maintained a positive balance, the volume of which at the end of the 2010s exceeded USD 200 million.⁴⁰

In March 2020, the first Belarusian-Indian Investment Forum was held in New Delhi with the participation of representatives of 9 Belarusian and more than 70 companies and organizations.⁴¹ In the same year, joint working groups for cooperation in the textile industry, pharmaceuticals, trade and investment were established.⁴² The most successful development was bilateral investment cooperation in the field of pharmaceuticals.⁴³

The third most important partner of Belarus in “far” Asia was Turkey. Political cooperation with this country in the 21st century has progressed without any problems. Turkey was visited twice by the President of the Republic of Belarus (in 2010 and 2019) and the heads of government of Belarus (in 2014 and 2015). In 2016, President of the Republic of Turkey R. Erdoğan visited Minsk, in 2018 — head of the Turkish government B. Yıldırım. The inter-parliamentary dialogue remained active, which was reinforced by the creation of friendship groups in the parliament. Steady contacts were maintained through the ministries of foreign affairs and other government bodies. The Intergovernmental Economic Commission, the Business Cooperation Council, bilateral commissions for cooperation in the field of the defense industry, tourism, international road traffic, through the Ministry of Internal Affairs operated successfully. In 2011, the Consulate

General of the Republic of Belarus in Istanbul began its work.

The volume of Belarusian-Turkish trade in 2009—2019 increased from USD 266.7 to USD 900 million. In 2020 it amounted to USD 863.8 million.⁴⁴ However, in trade in goods with Turkey in the 21st century Belarus had a negative balance. In 2001, its volume was USD 7.3 million, in 2010 — USD 153.1 million, in the second half of the 2010s, it steadily exceeded USD 600 million, dropping only to USD 477.4 million in 2020.⁴⁵ In the late 2010s, Belarusian exports to Turkey were dominated by petrochemicals, metalworking, light industry and wood processing products.⁴⁶ Imports from Turkey were dominated by agricultural products, knitted fabrics and fabrics, synthetic threads, clothing and footwear, and parts and accessories for motor vehicles.⁴⁷

Among Asian countries, Turkey has become the second most important investment partner of Belarus after China. By the beginning of 2021, more than 130 business entities with Turkish capital were registered in the Republic of Belarus, and the volume of Turkish investments in the Belarusian economy reached USD 61.7 million.⁴⁸ Turkish investors showed

⁴⁴ Belarus in Figures 2021 : Statistical Handbook [Беларусь в цифрах, 2021 : статистический справочник]. Minsk, 2021. P. 68. (In Russian).

⁴⁵ Belarus — Turkey Trade and Economic Cooperation // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of Turkey [Белорусско-турецкое торгово-экономическое сотрудничество // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Турецкой Республике]. 2021. URL: https://turkey.mfa.gov.by/ru/torgovo_ekonomicheskaya_slujba/bel_turk/ (accessed: 17.09.2021). (In Russian).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Erohina O. Belarus Sells Chemicals and Butter to Turkey and Buys Tomatoes and Knitwear // Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belarusi [Ерохина О. В Турцию Беларусь продает химикаты и сливочное масло, а покупает — томаты и трикотаж // Комсомольская правда в Беларуси]. February 15, 2018. URL: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26795.4/3830019/> (accessed: 18.09.2020). (In Russian).

⁴⁸ See: Belarus — Turkey Trade and Economic Cooperation // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of Turkey [Белорусско-турецкое торгово-экономическое сотрудничество // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Турецкой Республике]. 2021. URL:

³⁹ Cooperation with India in trade and investment // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of India [Сотрудничество с Индией в сфере торговли и инвестиций // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Республике Индия]. 2021. URL: https://india.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/trade_economic/ (accessed: 26.09.2021). (In Russian).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

an increased interest in the telecommunications and hotel business in Belarus. With the financial support of Turkey, the Cathedral Mosque was built in Minsk.⁴⁹

Turkey was one of the most popular destinations for Belarusian tourists and the most popular destination for their holidays in Asia. To a large extent, this was facilitated by the agreement on a visa-free regime, which entered into force in 2014. If in 2013 about 99 thousand tourists from Belarus visited Turkey, then in 2019 — more than 155 thousand.⁵⁰

Belarus also worked with other Asian states. In policy statements made up to 2021, the President of Belarus included Vietnam, South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Lebanon, Oman and Saudi Arabia among the promising partners in Asia.⁵¹

https://turkey.mfa.gov.by/ru/torgovo_ekonomicheskaya_slujba/bel_turk/ (accessed: 17.09.2021). (In Russian); Belarus in Figures 2021 : Statistical Handbook [Беларусь в цифрах, 2021 : статистический справочник]. Minsk, 2021. P. 68. (In Russian).

⁴⁹ Belarus — Turkey Trade and Economic Cooperation // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of Turkey [Белорусско-турецкое торгово-экономическое сотрудничество // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Турецкой Республике]. 2021. URL: https://turkey.mfa.gov.by/ru/torgovo_ekonomicheskaya_slujba/bel_turk/ (accessed: 17.09.2021). (In Russian)

⁵⁰ See: Tourism and Tourist Resources in the Republic of Belarus : Statistical Collection [Туризм и туристические ресурсы в Республике Беларусь : статистический сборник]. Minsk, 2014. P. 35. (In Russian); Belarus in figures, 2020 : Statistical Handbook [Беларусь в цифрах, 2020 : статистический справочник]. Minsk, 2020. P. 54. (In Russian).

⁵¹ See: Foreign Policy of Belarus : Collection of Reports and Materials [Знешняя палітыка Беларусі: зб. дак. і матэрыялаў]. Vol. 9. Minsk : BGU publ., 2013. P. 75, 437. (In Belarusian); Ibid. Vol. 10. Minsk : BGU publ., 2014. P. 520. (In Belarusian); Address to the Belarusian People and the National Assembly // President of the Republic of Belarus [Послание белорусскому народу и Национальному собранию // Президент Республики Беларусь]. April 21, 2011. URL: <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/poslanie-beloruskomu-narodu-i-natsionalnomu-sobraniju-5804> (accessed: 18.08.2020). (In Russian); Report of the President of Belarus to the Fifth All-Belarusian People's Assembly //

In 2008, the Republic of Belarus opened an embassy in the UAE, in 2011 — in Indonesia, in 2014 — in Qatar, Mongolia and Pakistan. The President of the Republic of Belarus visited Bahrain (2002), Vietnam (2008, 2015), Indonesia (2013), Iran (2006), Qatar (2001, 2011, 2016), Kuwait (2002), Lebanon (2005), UAE (2007, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019), Pakistan (2015, 2016), Singapore (2013). Heads and representatives of the Government of the Republic of Belarus in 2001—2020 made visits to Vietnam, Jordan, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan, Singapore, South Korea, the leaders of the Belarusian parliament visited Vietnam, Iran, Pakistan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, South Korea. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus paid visits to Vietnam, Indonesia, Jordan, Laos, Malaysia and Syria.

In 2001—2020, Belarus was visited by the heads of states and governments of Vietnam, Iran, Cambodia, Qatar, Laos, Lebanon, Pakistan, Syria, Sri Lanka; members of the governments of Bangladesh, Israel, Indonesia, Lebanon, Mongolia, UAE, Syria, Sri Lanka, South Korea; parliamentary delegations of Vietnam, Indonesia, Jordan, Iran, Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Singapore, Thailand, South Korea, Japan; foreign ministers of Bangladesh, Mongolia, Myanmar, Syria.

In the 21st century, Belarus has paid more attention to the activities of regional and sub-regional groupings in Asia — the SCO, the League of Arab States, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In 2005, the leadership of the Republic of Belarus set the task for Belarusian diplomats to achieve observer status in the SCO. This task was completed in 2015. In 2016—2019, A. Lukashenko took part in all the SCO summits (it is significant that at the same time he refused to participate in the Eastern

President of the Republic of Belarus [Доклад Президента Беларуси на пятом Всебелорусском народном собрании // Президент Республики Беларусь]. June 22, 2016. URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/uchastie-v-pjatom-vsebelorusskom-narodnom-sobranii-13867 (accessed: 22.08.2020). (In Russian).

Partnership summits). At the SCO summit in Bishkek in June 2019, he expressed the opinion that the Organization should help neutralize threats in the field of security, identify points of contact and interaction in the economic field.⁵² Belarus cooperated with ASEAN and the League of Arab States in a dialogue format.

Belarus had no major problems communicating with Asian countries, but the unproblematic political dialogue was not always backed up by successes in the development of economic ties. Even in the best years, the trade turnover with individual Asian countries (except for China, India and Turkey) did not exceed USD 300 million. In a number of cases, the development of cooperation was hampered by external factors, primarily military conflicts and economic sanctions. This was the case with Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and Syria. Some Asian countries (Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia) did not show much interest in expanding cooperation with Belarus, despite the attempts of Belarusian diplomacy to achieve this.

In general, trade in goods between Belarus and Asian countries increased from USD 745.5 to USD 745.5 million in 2001 to USD 9.8 billion in 2019. The share of these countries in the foreign trade of Belarus increased from 4.7% in 2001 to 13.5% in 2019, although it was still inferior to the share of European countries (in 2019, the EU countries accounted for about 22% of Belarusian foreign trade).⁵³ However, the specifics of trade operations in the 21st century were the reduction in exports of

Belarusian complex and technical products. In the late 2010s, the basis of Belarusian exports to the countries of East and South Asia (China, India, ASEAN countries) was mineral fertilizers.⁵⁴

The activity of the Belarusian leadership on the Asian track was critically perceived by the Belarusian opposition. Thus, in February 2012, the Belarusian Popular Front party expressed its intention to prevent the transformation of Belarus into a “Chinese island in the center of Europe.”⁵⁵ A similar point of view was shared by Belarusian liberals, who argued that cooperation with distant Asian countries impedes reforms in Belarus and the development of its dialogue with the EU.⁵⁶

Political upheavals in Belarus in 2020 have significantly changed its international position. In November 2020, A. Lukashenko, at a

⁵⁴ See: Trade and Economic Cooperation // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the People’s Republic of China [Торгово-экономическое сотрудничество // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Китайской Народной Республике]. 2021. URL: <https://china.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral/trade/> (accessed: 20.09.2021). (In Russian); Cooperation with India in Trade And Investment // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of India [Сотрудничество с Индией в сфере торговли и инвестиций // Посольство Республики Беларусь в Республике Индия]. 2021. URL: https://india.mfa.gov.by/ru/bilateral_relations/trade_economic/ (accessed: 26.09.2021). (In Russian); On the Cooperation of the Republic of Belarus with the Asia-Pacific Partnership (ASEAN) // Embassy of the Republic of Belarus to the Republic of Indonesia [Аб супрацоўніцтве Рэспублікі Беларусь з Асацыяцыяй дзяржаў Паўднёва-Усходняй Азіі (АСЕАН) // Пасольства Рэспублікі Беларусь у Рэспубліцы Інданезія]. 2021. URL: <https://indonesia.mfa.gov.by/be/asean/> (accessed: 20.09.2021). (In Belarusian).

⁵⁵ Transformation of Belarus into a “Chinese island in Europe” contradicts our national interests // BPF Party [Пераварэнне Беларусі ў “кітайскую выспу ў Эўропе” супярэчыць нашым нацыянальным інтарэсам // Партыя БНФ]. 2012. URL: <http://narodny.org/?p=180> (accessed: 09.07.2020). (In Belarusian).

⁵⁶ Gevarkin A. Will Belarus benefit from cooperation with the SCO? [Геваркин А. Принесет ли пользу Беларуси сотрудничество с ШОС] // UDF.by. July 14, 2015. URL: <https://udf.by/news/sobytie/125056-prineset-li-polzu-belarusi-sotrudnichestvo-s-shos.html> (accessed: 30.09.2020). (In Russian).

⁵² Matveev V. Lukashenko at the SCO Summit: The Global Security System Is Bursting at the Seams // BelTA [Матвеев В. Лукашенко на саммите ШОС: система глобальной безопасности трещит по швам // БелТА]. June 14, 2019. URL: <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-na-sammite-shos-sistema-globalnoj-bezopasnosti-treschit-po-shvam-351064-2019/> (accessed: 07.08.2020). (In Russian).

⁵³ Foreign Trade of the Republic of Belarus : Statistical Collection [Внешняя торговля Республики Беларусь : статистический сборник]. Minsk, 2020. P. 19, 52. (In Russian).

meeting on foreign policy issues, accused the “collective West” of organizing “blatant aggression” against the Belarusian state.⁵⁷ Based on this, the President demanded to strengthen the Eurasian component in the foreign policy of Belarus, primarily through expanding cooperation with Russia and China.⁵⁸ The corresponding attitude was confirmed at the VI All-Belarusian Assembly on 11 February 2021.⁵⁹

The head of state’s instructions have been complied with. At the end of 2020, Belarus and Russia agreed on the principles of a visa policy (this problem has not been resolved since 2017). In spring 2021, transit of Belarusian oil was redirected from the ports of the Baltic States to Russian ports. Transport links between the two countries have resumed. In September 2021, Belarus and Russia switched to reduced roaming rates. The agreement on roadmaps (alliance programs) was accelerated.

Negotiations were launched with China on the facilitation of trade procedures and expansion of access for Belarusian products to the Chinese market, veterinary and quarantine supervision, improvement of supply chains, and facilitation of trade in services.⁶⁰ In January

2021, the Consulate General in Chongqing was added to the existing consular offices of Belarus in China.

It can be assumed that while maintaining the current political and socio-economic system, the trend towards expanding cooperation between Belarus and the states of Eurasia in the new decade of the 21st century will intensify. The values of the respective states are more understandable and meaningful to the Belarusian leadership, compared with the values of the “collective West.” However, at the current stage, the Eurasian component in Belarusian foreign policy is still insufficiently developed in theoretical terms.

Conclusion

The Eurasian vector in the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus was not genuine due to its geographical position and peculiarities of historical development. Initially, only the Russian Federation acted as the main partner of Belarus in Eurasia. It was not until the second half of the 1990s that other Asian actors were added. Economic interests predetermined the activity of the Belarusian state in the Eurasian space, although political factors had also some impact (the desire to maintain stability, prove the effectiveness of the multi-vector foreign policy, and expand the range of communication on the world stage).

In the 21st century, the Eurasian policy of Belarus was formed taking into account the ideas of the Belarusian leadership regarding the significance of the respective states in global politics and the economy. The high degree of subjective factor in the choice of external partners in Eurasia predetermined the emergence of situations where the absence of problems with one or another state at the political level was not backed up by significant results in the economic and other areas.

For Belarus a specific feature in the Eurasian space was the lack of a request for a conceptual elaboration of the issues of interaction with the actors of the said space.

⁵⁷ Meeting on Topical Issues of Foreign Policy // President of the Republic of Belarus [Совещание по актуальным вопросам внешней политики // Президент Республики Беларусь]. November 17, 2020. URL: <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/soveshchanie-po-voprosam-vneshney-politiki> (accessed: 01.12.2020). (In Russian).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Report of the President of Belarus to the VI All-Belarusian People’s Assembly // President of the Republic of Belarus [Доклад Президента Беларуси на VI Всебелорусском народном собрании // Президент Республики Беларусь]. February 11, 2021. URL: <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/shestoe-vsebelorusskoe-narodnoe-sobranie> (accessed: 05.05.2021). (In Russian).

⁶⁰ Belarus and China Set up a Platform to Work out Issues of Access to the Chinese Market // BelTA [Беларусь и КНР создали площадку для отработки вопросов доступа на китайский рынок // Белорусское телеграфное агентство (БелТА)]. December 16, 2020. URL: <https://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-knr-sozdali-ploschadku-dlja-otrabotki-voprosov-dostupa-na-kitajskij-rynok-420487-2020/> (accessed: 16.12.2020). (In Russian).

Belarusian politicians and experts did not perceive Eurasia as an original cultural and civilizational component and gave a clear preference to the functional and geographical aspects of cooperation (first of all, there was a desire to receive specific economic and political dividends in the development of bilateral ties with the states of Eurasia). It is shared opinion in Belarusian expert community that the implementation of the Eurasian megaproject leads to a decrease in the significance of the Belarusian-Russian alliance.

The political and economic realities in which Belarus exists at the current stage of its development give reason to assume that the importance of the states of the Eurasian space in its foreign policy will increase. Currently, its leading partner in Eurasia is Russia, relations with which are built not only on a bilateral basis, but also within the framework of integration alliances (Union State, EAEU, and CSTO). The importance of Russia for Belarus is extremely high in the areas of trade and investment, energy, transport, and security. The second position in the hierarchy of Eurasian priorities of Belarus is occupied by China, with which cooperation is successfully carried out in the field of trade, investment and transport in

the context of the implementation of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. Based on the state of political dialogue and the results of trade, economic and investment cooperation, the interaction of Belarus with India, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, which is formed on the basis of a “strategic partnership,” looks promising. Belarus will give preference to expanding and deepening ties with the states of Eurasia on the bilateral basis. In multilateral format, the priority of its foreign policy will be the development of relations with partner countries within the framework of the EAEU, the CSTO, and the SCO.

A factor hindering the development of cooperation may be the tightening of economic and financial sanctions by the EU and the United States against Belarus (first of all, sanctions may make it difficult to communicate with the countries of “far” Asia). There should be more attention paid to the fact that the Eurasian policy of Belarus has not yet acquired a clear conceptual basis and continues to be formed on the basis of situational (ad hoc) response, with the functional and geographical component prevailing over the cultural and civilizational one.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 27.07.2021

Revised / Доработана после рецензирования: 12.09.2021

Accepted / Принята к публикации: 21.12.2021

References

- Aleksandrovich, A. (2008). Belarusian-Kazakh relations in 1991—2006. *Belarusian Historical Magazine*, (5), 3—10. (In Belarusian).
- Astakhova, S. (2014). Relations between Russia and Belarus in the new political realities. *Russia and New States of Eurasia*, (3), 72—79. (In Russian).
- Borishpolets, K. P., & Chernyavsky, S. I. (2012). Russia — Belarus relations: Actual and virtual threats. *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, (11), 57—63. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2012-11-57-63>
- Chasnouski, M., & Khudayberdiyeva, N. (2016). Belarus and Turkmenistan as CIS states — an evolving relationship (1991—2015). In V. G. Shadurskiy (Ed.), *Working papers of the faculty of international relations* (Vol. VII, pp. 39—46). Minsk: BGU publ.
- Chetverikova, A. S. (2016). Russia — Belarus relations in new political and economic realities. *Russian Foreign Economic Journal*, (5), 16—28. (In Russian).
- Czachor, R. (2011). *Polityka zagraniczna Republiki Białoruś w latach 1991—2011. Studium politologiczne*. Polkowice: Wyd. Dolnośląskiej Wyższej Szkoły Przedsiębiorczości i Techniki w Polkowicach.

- Dostanko, E. A., & Rubo, O. P. (2021). International multilateral cooperation of the Republic of Belarus. In E. V. Pilgun (Ed.), *The Republic of Belarus in the modern world* (pp. 43—58). Minsk: Izdatel'skii tsentr BGU publ. (In Russian).
- Dudik, V. F. (2007). Development of Belarusian-Chinese relations at the beginning of the 21st century. *Vesnik of Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno. Series 1*, (4), 33—41. (In Russian).
- Eberhardt, A. (2008). *Gra pozorów: Stosunki rosyjsko-białoruskie. 1991—2008*. Warszawa: PISM.
- Filipyuk, A. N. (2005). Development of foreign policy dialogue and economic ties between Belarus and China. *Journal of International Law and International Relations*, (3), 75—82. (In Russian).
- Ganbarov, B. A. (2014). *The Republic of Belarus in the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2001—2012*. Minsk: Pravo i ekonomika publ. (In Russian).
- Garnet, S., & Legvold, R. (1998). *Belarus at a crossroads: In search of an international identity*. Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. (In Russian).
- Godin, Y. (2014). Foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus (1991—2014). *Russia and New States of Eurasia*, (3), 23—35. (In Russian).
- Kosov, A. P., & Yurchak, D. V. (2021). *The Republic of Belarus in the integration processes in the post-Soviet space*. Vitebsk: VGU im. P. M. Masherova publ. (In Russian).
- Kuzmina, E. M. (2018). Belarus in the EAEU: Problems and opportunities. In O. V. Petrovskaya (Ed.), *Experience and prospects of Belarusian-Russian integration projects: a collection of articles of the international conference* (pp. 97—112). Moscow: RISI publ. (In Russian).
- Matsel, V. M. (2002). Regional priorities of Belarus' foreign policy (on the example of bilateral cooperation with Asian states). In V. Astapenko (Ed.), *Foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus in historical retrospect: a collection of articles of the international conference* (pp. 179—190). Minsk: BGU publ. (In Russian).
- Matsel, V. M. (2004). *Formation and development of friendly Belarusian-Chinese relations*. Baranovichi: Baranovichskaya ukрупnennaya tipografija publ. (In Russian).
- Mironowicz, E. (2011). *Polityka zagraniczna Białorusi. 1990—2010*. Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie Trans Humana.
- Orlova, I. A., & Andreeva, E. S. (2018). Cooperation between Russia and Belarus in the military-political sphere: Legal problems and conflicts. In O. V. Petrovskaya (Ed.), *Experience and prospects of Belarusian-Russian integration projects: a collection of articles of the international conference* (pp. 205—217). Moscow: RISI publ. (In Russian).
- Petrovskaya, O. V. (2018). Russian-Belarusian integration project: Achievements, problems, potential. In O. V. Petrovskaya (Ed.), *Experience and prospects of Belarusian-Russian integration projects: a collection of articles of the international conference* (pp. 8—41). Moscow: RISI publ. (In Russian).
- Pimoshenko, I. I. (2001). Belarusian-Russian military relations: From neutrality to collective security. *Belarusian Journal of International Law and International Relations*, (3), 68—70. (In Russian).
- Rupakova, E. A. (2013). Formation of the legal framework of the Belarusian-Turkish relations. *Journal of International Law and International Relations*, (4), 57—62. (In Russian).
- Rusakovich, A. V. (2019). Union state of Belarus and Russia: Experience and lessons of political discussions in the early of the 2000s. *Journal of International Law and International Relations*, (1—2), 29—36. (In Russian).
- Shadurskij, V. G. (2014). Arab States in the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus (1992—2013). In V. G. Shadurskij (Ed.), *Working papers of the faculty of international relations* (Vol. IV, pp. 38—47). Minsk: BGU publ. (In Russian).
- Shadurskij, V. G. (2010). Implementation of the multi-vector principle in the Belarusian foreign policy. In V. G. Shadurskij (Ed.), *Working papers of the faculty of international relations* (Vol. I, pp. 47—51). Minsk: Tesey publ. (In Russian).
- Shadurskij, V. G. (2012). We need the Turkish coast. *Belarusian Thought*, (4), 21—27. (In Russian).
- Shadurskij, V. G. (2018). Belarusian-Pakistani cooperation: Formation of legal and institutional foundations. In V. G. Shadurskij (Ed.), *Belarus in the modern world. Materials of the XVII International scientific conference* (pp. 69—72). Minsk: BGU publ. (In Russian).
- Sharapo, A. V. (2012). *The Republic of Belarus in the context of the geopolitics of the 21st century: Collection of articles*. Minsk, BGU publ. (In Russian).

- Shykh, K.V. (2017). The current state of Belarusian-Israeli relations: Basic trends. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 17(1), 111—121. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2017-17-1-111-121>
- Snapkouski, U. E. (2009). *Belarusian-Russian relations: Collection of scientific articles*. Minsk: BSU publ. (In Belarusian).
- Svilas, S. F., & Evseychik, T. V. (2009). *Relations of the Republic of Belarus with the countries of the Arab world*. Minsk: BSU publ. (In Russian).
- Timmermann, H. (2002). Die Widersprüchlichen Beziehungen Russland-Belarus im europäischen Kontext. *SWP-Studien*, S 37, 1—44. Retrieved from https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/studien/S37_02_sicher.pdf
- Turarbekova, R. M. (2020). Belarusian-Chinese relations: Evolution and the COVID-19 factor. *Journal of International Law and International Relations*, (1—2), 72—78. (In Russian).
- Ulakhovich, V. Y. (2009). *Formation of the foundations of the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus (1991—2005)*. Minsk: Kharvest publ. (In Russian).

About the author: *Tsikhamirau Aliaksandr Valiantsinavich* — PhD in History, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Belarusian State University; ORCID: 0000-0002-0441-3377; e-mail: tihomirow@list.ru