



***The proposals of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum***

to the fifth meeting of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group

(26-27 April 2018, Minsk)

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION .....3

Energy and energy efficiency .....3

Higher education reform .....4

Entrepreneurship and SME development .....5

Other issues .....5

## INTRODUCTION

The mere fact of holding the fifth meeting of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group points to a rather stable process of the dialogue between Belarus and the European Union. Today, this dialogue takes place in a range of areas and formats, ranging from the Coordination Group and Human Rights Dialogue to sectoral dialogue and successful implementation of a handful of projects supported by the European Union. The Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum highly appreciates the progress achieved in EU-Belarus relations in recent years and looks forward to their further development.

At the same time, there is a number of important concerns about current cooperation, the most pressing of which is the lack of **observable systemic changes** in Belarus. In almost any area of cooperation one can see positive developments in the field of the communication and declarations of intent with an obvious stagnation in the field of implementation and achieving concrete results. We are deeply convinced that currently the potential of symbolic steps towards each other has been already exhausted and further lack of progress in deeds can lead to a halt or even rollback of the achieved results.

Another important difficulty is the issue of finalising and **signing the partnership priorities**. The Belarusian National Platform urges the parties to find a quick compromise and have the official signing of the partnership priorities in the near future. This issue becomes critically important, in particular, because further postponement of the signing will affect all other formats of cooperation, including the expansion of Belarus' access to EU technical assistance and financial support instruments. The signing of the partnership priorities, as well as the conclusion of negotiations and signing of Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements are necessary steps for starting the negotiations on a new bilateral agreement between Belarus and the EU and restoring the legal framework of bilateral cooperation between Belarus and the EU.

Without focusing on the analysis of the situation, problematic issues and proposals made in the previous document of the Belarusian National Platform<sup>1</sup>, we will focus on some of the new proposals of the civil society on how to develop cooperation and coordination:

### Energy and energy efficiency

#### *Description of the situation*

Over 25 years of independent Belarus existence, the energy system and the government policy in the field of energy management have undergone positive changes, but the reform in this area is still far from complete. Dependence on external energy sources remains the defining feature of Belarus energy system. Almost 90% of the fuel used in the energy sector is imported from Russia, and in its electricity production Belarus is almost completely dependent on natural gas supplies from Russia. Adopted at the end of 2015, the Concept of Energy Security of Belarus states that the level of dependence on external suppliers remains critical and sets specific goals to reduce dependence on supplies from abroad. An important aspect of the energy security concept of Belarus is a plan for a phased reduction of cross subsidies in energy tariffs and gas prices, and improving the system of tariffs setting to encourage consumers to make more efficient use of energy. Energy efficiency also remains a key priority of energy policy in Belarus. The development of the renewable energy sector is an integral part of the national policy of Belarus in the field of energy security and reducing climate impact.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Belarusian National Platform. Memo to the fourth meeting of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group (Brussels, 19-20 December 2017)

## Proposals

In order to facilitate the resolution of the existing problematic issues in energy policy, energy security and reduce climate impact, we propose to consider the option of scenario planning when Belarus switches to renewable energy by 2050.

The scenario is a tool to describe possible development paths, to provide the decision-makers with the idea of future energy system transformation. We suggest to compare two scenarios of possible development pathways for a future energy supply system:

- The baseline scenario, reflecting a continuation of current trends and policies;
- The scenario of energy [r]evolution designed to achieve environmental policy objectives, leading to optimistic, but still a possible way to greatly carbon free energy system by 2050 in close connection with the baseline framework assumptions of the reference scenario.

The scenario of the energy [r]evolution was developed by the German Aerospace Agency (DLR, Stuttgart) for more than 30 countries and is now one of the most developed tools in this field. This methodology incorporates the latest models and its reputation is confirmed by the use of the Intergovernmental Panel of Experts (IPCC) in the report for the Paris Climate Change Conference (COP21).

The scenario of energy [r]evolution does not attempt to predict the future; it describes and compares potential development paths from a wide range of possible alternatives. The concept of scenarios is intended to indicate the actions required to achieve ambitious goals, to illustrate available options to change the supply system into a more sustainable one (see *Annex 1. Energy [R]evolution: a Sustainable Belarus Energy Outlook, Extended summary of preliminary results*).

## Higher education reform

### *Description of the situation*

In 2015, at the Yerevan EHEA summit Belarus was admitted to the Bologna process on the condition of implementation of The Belarus Roadmap for Higher Education Reform by 2018. In accordance with the Roadmap implementation schedule, by the present moment Belarus had to honour all of its obligations, while actually fulfilling only a small part of them. The report of BFUG monitoring group, in particular, specifies: The Roadmap will not be implemented by 2018. Some limited progress has been made in some areas of the Roadmap, but there is still a need to develop a common understanding of the connectivity and interdependence of the Bologna tools".<sup>2</sup>

### *Proposals*

In light of the European Higher Education Area ministers conference in May 2018, as well as in light of the recently developed by the Ministry of education Draft strategic action plan for the implementation of the general objectives of the educational system in accordance with the principles and tools of EHEA, we suggest:

1. To give the "Strategic plan" the legitimate status of the commitments of the Belarusian government.
2. To keep full commitment to implement all the provisions of the Roadmap, including the references to the implementation of the respective EHEA standards and guidelines in the "Strategic plan".
3. To keep special procedure for monitoring the implementation of the obligations and the Advisory Group mission within the framework of BFUG.

---

<sup>2</sup> Advisory Group 2 "Support for the Belarus roadmap", DRAFT FINAL REPORT, 31.01.2018

4. At the 2020 summit to consider a report on the implementation of the "Strategic plan" obligations by Belarus and to make a decision about the future status of Belarus in the European Higher Education Area.
5. To include the BNP as one of the higher education stakeholders to assist and facilitate the Ministry of Education and BFUG experts in the implementation of the Strategic plan.

## Entrepreneurship and SME development

### *Description of the situation*

Full implementation of the provisions of Decree No. 7 dated November 23, 2017 "On the development of entrepreneurship" is able to give a new impetus to the development of small and medium business in Belarus. The formation of Public Advisory Councils (PAC) with the participation of representatives of business associations and the business community at national and regional level is a positive step for the implementation of Decree No. 7. At the same time, it should be noted that PACs often lack understanding of the general meaning and purpose of such bodies, as well as their participants lack necessary competences.

### *Proposals*

The participants of the Belarusian National Platform representing business associations can facilitate the establishment and development of the system of national and regional public advisory councils, covering the issues of:

1. problems and challenges articulation while establishing national and regional public advisory councils;
2. methodology and roadmap development for building a dialogue between business and local authorities to improve private initiative
3. development and implementation of training programs for representatives of PAC to build their capacity.

## Other issues

Organizations of civil society in Belarus are also ready, if there is political will on the part of the Belarusian authorities, to promote reforms in the areas of:

- improving agricultural sustainability, including the issues of optimization of agriculture under climate change, development of measures to protect soil from degradation, conservation and increase of biodiversity, improving the structure of nutrition, new jobs creation and improvement of working and social conditions in agriculture.
- solving issues of improving conditions for civil society, including the issues of freedom of association and changing the registration rules of external assistance;
- improving the situation with human rights, including the providing of the Interagency Action Plan with tools for its implementation;
- ensuring the conditions and development of citizens' access to socially important information and decision-making mechanisms for solving problems at the local level.
- the participation of citizens and civil society organizations in the further implementation of previously approved national plans (the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, etc.).