



Беларуская нацыянальная платформа
Форум грамадзянскай супольнасці
УСХОДНЯГА ПАРТНЁРСТВА

The fifth meeting of the Coordination Group "EU-Belarus" was held in Minsk: Civil society representatives expressed their proposals on key topics of the dialogue

The meeting of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group was held in Minsk on April 26-27, 2018. Representatives of Belarusian CSOs shared their impressions of the meeting of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group at a briefing held on April 27 at the office of the Belarusian Association of Journalists.

Format

Representatives of the European External Action Service, representatives of the relevant departments and agencies of the European Commission attended the meetings on behalf of the European Union.

From the Belarusian side - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, government officials at the level of deputy ministers and heads of departments of respective ministries. The Belarusian EaP CSF National Platform was represented by:

- Ulad Vialichka, Director of the International Consortium "EuroBelarus"
- Irina Sukhiy, member of the Board of NGO "Ecohome"
- Andrei Yahorau, Director of the Center for European Transformation,
- Christina Richter, Director of establishment "Youth Labor Rights" (YLaR),
- Aleg Hulak, RPO "Belarusian Helsinki Committee" (BHC).

Representatives of civil society, taking into account the absence of significant changes in comparison with the last round of the dialogue in December 2017, referred to their assessments of the end of last year, and also brought to the participants of the dialogue their position on a number of issues of the Belarusian-European relations with a special focus on the aspects:

1. The Bologna Process and the inclusion of Belarus in the European Higher Education Area,
2. Energy efficiency, energy security and use of alternative energy sources,
3. Implementing activities to develop an enabling environment for entrepreneurship.

"The general theme of the meetings included about 60 issues, including privatization and restructuring enterprises, social dialogue and labor market, agriculture and phyto-sanitary control, customs interaction, transport, the digital economy, macroeconomic stabilization and trade," says Andrei Yahorau.

What did the representatives of the National Platform suggest?

1. Energy and energy efficiency, alternative energy sources

Irina Sukhiy said that the German Aerospace Agency, on the request of Belarusian environmental organizations, developed a scenario of Belarus' transition to 100% renewable energy sources by 2050. According to Irina, "this is a serious work of 600 engineers who calculated the scenario on the basis of Belarusian data. We would like to discuss this scenario with the Ministry of Energy".

Andrei Yahorau: "Such scenarios were created for almost 40 countries and were highly appreciated by intergovernmental groups of climate experts. Countries that seek to reduce emissions into the atmosphere are actively using these scenarios. This is a scientific analysis that suggests other approaches to the development of energy in our country. Now we have such a strategy for Belarus, which should be discussed with a number of state and public partners".

2. Development of favorable conditions for entrepreneurship

Ulad Vialichka: "One of the important steps towards improving the climate for entrepreneurship in our country was the recent Decree No. 7" On the Development of Entrepreneurship". The Decree is assessed by the business associations and the business community as an important step in the right direction, but the tools for its implementation are imperfect, they need to be improved. In particular, the Decree provides creation of numerous public advisory councils at the regional level for state-public dialogue on this issue. But the practice of such councils is still weak and imperfect, there is not enough preparation, capacity of both sides to talk with an orientation toward certain changes and results. In this, the Belarusian business associations and public organizations are ready to help, so that the tool of advisory councils really becomes result-oriented. Also, Belarusian business associations express their intention to make an analysis of the extent to which the normative acts that have been adopted in recent months are really working to improve the business environment, they are ready to share their findings with relevant state actors".

3. The Bologna process and the inclusion of Belarus in the European Higher Education Area

Christina Richter: "The Belarusian side notes the growing mobility of teachers and students. This is indeed a certain positive, which brought the Bologna process. At the meetings, the issue of mandatory work placement was touched upon, this mechanism by itself is not very clear for the EU representatives".

Andrei Yahorau: "In May, the issue of the further status of Belarus in the Bologna process will be decided. According to the conclusions of the appropriate international monitoring body of the Bologna Process, Belarus have not fulfilled the Road Map on most points, therefore:

1. Either Belarus will be included in the group of countries that have problems with the implementation of the requirements of the Bologna Process. The Belarusian side insists on this. This step significantly reduces the ambitions in the field of education reform.
2. Another alternative: Belarus will remain in the status of a "special case" and will continue to implement the "roadmap" of reforms in the next period. The European side is inclined towards this option.
3. The most negative scenario may be the exclusion of Belarus from the Bologna process. But this is unlikely, since such a procedure does not actually exist.

Other topics: Trade and transport

Ulad Vialichka: "Transport and trade issues have obvious bilateral interest. Of particular interest to Belarus is the opportunity to enter European markets, as well as the possibility of greater

integration of the Belarusian transport structure into the pan-European corridors. This was thoroughly discussed by representatives of Belarusian ministries and EU representatives".

Eastern Partnership Initiative

Andrei Yahorau: "European and Belarusian partners in different ways see the capacity of this initiative. The European side is guided by the document "Deliverables 2020 for the Eastern Partnership", which is a specific program that assigns certain responsibilities to the parties, while the Belarusian side sees the Eastern Partnership as a range of opportunities and tries to choose what of these opportunities are of the greatest interest".

Partnership Priorities

Ulad Vialichka: "Partnership priorities are a form of dialogue that should compensate for the absence of a bilateral agreement between Belarus and the EU. We expected that these priorities would be announced soon. Unfortunately, the negotiations are still not over. This means that Belarus remains deprived of a number of opportunities, including access to European programs and resources".

The next round of negotiations within the framework of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group will be held in autumn 2018.



Press-release is prepared within the frame of the EU funded project,
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