



UDC 327(476)

AFRICAN DIMENSION OF FOREIGN POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS (1992–2020)

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The presented publication is devoted to the analysis of the formation and implementation of the African dimension of Belarusian foreign policy. The main objective of this policy was to strengthen the Belarusian economic presence in the states of the continent. In terms of limited financial opportunities, official Minsk identified four large countries in Africa as “reference points” in which embassies were opened, exchange of delegations was more intensive, a regulatory framework for cooperation was formed, and trade and economic relations developed. Despite a number of constraining factors such as complex logistics, geographic remoteness, etc., Belarus has significant potential to increase exports to Africa. The priority of the foreign policy of the Belarusian state remains the development of relations with the countries of the African continent, including through strengthening ties with the integration associations of Africa, using the EAEU format and platform.

Keywords: Belarus; Africa; Egypt; African Union; diplomatic relations; economic diplomacy; Belarusian-African cooperation; foreign trade.

АФРИКАНСКИЙ ВЕКТОР ВО ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКЕ РЕСПУБЛИКИ БЕЛАРУСЬ (1992–2020)

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Анализируются формирование и реализация африканского вектора во внешней политике Беларуси, главная задача которой – усиление белорусского экономического присутствия в государствах континента. В условиях ограниченных финансовых возможностей официальный Минск определил в Африке в качестве опорных точек четыре крупные страны, в них были открыты посольства. Обмен официальными визитами, формирование нормативно-правовой базы сотрудничества, развитие торгово-экономических отношений с этими государствами были более интенсивными. Несмотря на ряд сдерживающих факторов (сложная логистика, географическая удаленность и др.), Беларусь

Образец цитирования:

Шадурский ВГ, Иодчик БГ. Африканский вектор во внешней политике Республики Беларусь (1992–2020). Журнал Белорусского государственного университета. Международные отношения. 2021;1:21–35 (на англ.).

For citation:

Shadurski VG, Iodchik BG. African dimension of foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus (1992–2020). *Journal of the Belarusian State University. International Relations*. 2021;1:21–35.

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имеет значительный потенциал к наращиванию экспорта в Африку. Приоритетом внешней политики белорусского государства остается развитие отношений со странами африканского континента, в том числе посредством укрепления связей с интеграционными объединениями Африки в рамках ЕАЭС.

Ключевые слова: Беларусь; Африка; Египет; Африканский союз; дипломатические отношения; экономическая дипломатия; белорусско-африканское сотрудничество; внешняя торговля.

Introduction

According to many domestic experts, the African region is one of the most underestimated in the hierarchy of the “far arc” of Belarusian foreign policy, primarily in terms of the economic potential of Minsk. Analysis of the state of affairs in this area allows us to conclude that new, possibly more non-standard measures are needed to expand the presence of Belarus on the African continent¹.

A balanced pragmatic approach to Africa with a rapidly growing population will allow Belarus to more effectively use and implement the “three-thirds” concept, which implies the sale of a third of the exported Belarusian products in the markets of the countries of the global South, including the African continent.

Despite the existing prospects, no noticeable research interest of the problems of Belarusian-African relations has yet been observed. This is largely due to the widespread opinion that there are no stable states on the continent that could become mutually beneficial partners of Belarus in the long term.

The topic of Africa seems not to be widely reflected in the studies of Belarusian authors, which can also be explained by the lack of traditions of scientific analysis of the African mentality, other important aspects of the life of African countries and peoples. It should be noted that both domestic and foreign analysts are more interested in Belarusian-African military-technical cooperation.

At the same time, it is already possible to name a number of authors whose research materials constituted the “African dossier” of the Belarusian expertise. Basically, these publications are devoted to historical topics. One of the pioneers of the African theme back in the BSSR period was professor S. D. Voitovich, whose scientific work has not lost its significance even now [1]. Among modern authors who wrote about Africa to one extent or another, one can name professors of the faculty of international relations of the Belarusian State University U. E. Snapkouski [2; 3] and S. F. Svi-las [4]. Special attention in the studies of these scien-

tists was paid to the activities of the BSSR in the UN in the 1970–1980s when representatives of the republic promoted anti-colonial agenda, supported the African peoples in their aspiration for independence [2]. The experience of Belarus in training national personnel for African countries, which began on a large scale in the mid-1960s, was reflected, to a certain extent, in the scientific literature. Teaching young people had a certain impact on the positive image of Belarus on the African continent (A. V. Sharapo, I. I. Savchenko [5]).

The authors of this article have publications on the theme of Africa of the period of independence of Belarus [6; 7].

In this article, there are links to the annual reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (2018, 2019), where the African dimension of the foreign policy is introduced². As for official legislation, Belarusian fundamental documents set a general framework for multi-vector foreign policy, which includes the African region, but these several documents have almost no specific information about the role of Africa in Belarusian foreign policy.

A new stage in the foreign policy of Belarus, including relations with African countries, began with the process of international recognition of the independence of our state after the collapse of the Soviet Union (December 1991). In the first years, African states were not considered by the official Minsk as promising partners due to the relative underdevelopment of relations and the lack of significant contacts. African countries did not demonstrate any serious interest in Belarus either. Contacts were mainly limited to the establishment of diplomatic relations, other formal procedures of interaction within the framework of coordinating actions in the UN. However, Belarus became a member of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1998 in order to build relations with developing countries, including African ones. Also, the first attempts of economic cooperation with the countries of the African region took place in the 1990s but were limited mostly to weapon exports.

¹Priority areas of foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.mfa.gov.by/foreign_policy/priorities/ (date of access: 28.05.2020).

²Обзор итогов внешней политики Республики Беларусь и деятельности Министерства иностранных дел в 2018 году [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <http://www.mfa.gov.by/publication/reports/b7fe6b330b96c9b7.html> (дата обращения: 29.03.2020) ; Обзор итогов внешней политики Республики Беларусь и деятельности Министерства иностранных дел в 2019 году [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.by/publication/reports/d850d69242f0c67a.html> (дата обращения: 10.04.2020).



Political cooperation

In the context of a shortage of necessary resources, the main task of the Belarusian foreign ministry in Africa was the selection of the so-called “reference points”. This choice was supported by the establishment of an official diplomatic presence of Belarus in the selected states. According to the authors of this publication, when deciding on the location of embassies in some African states, a range of factors were taken into account such as historical ties (contacts during the Soviet period, earlier establishment of diplomatic relations), more convenient transport communications, complementary nature of economies and great opportunities for Belarusian exports, relative political and economic stability of partner states.

Today, Belarusian embassies on the continent operate in relatively developed countries, where the governing bodies of regional integration associations are located, as well as African offices of international organizations. The territories of these African countries make it easier technically to enter the markets of neighboring countries, to expand Belarusian exports.

Exchanges of visits were more frequent and the legislative base was formed more intensively with the countries, named reference points. These events were designed to create conditions for the growth of mutual trade. The process of choosing priority states for cooperation developed unevenly; the countries that did not meet the expectations were replaced by other states.

As of today, there are four Belarusian embassies in Africa. With some assumptions, they can be called the centers of the active presence of Belarus, conditionally covering the north-south, west-east of the African continent. It should be emphasized that the embassies

in Africa make up a small share in the structure of the diplomatic missions of Belarus abroad. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, today there are 68 Belarusian diplomatic missions abroad, including 57 embassies, 2 permanent missions, 8 general consulates, and 1 consulate³.

The first position in the foreign policy priorities of Minsk is occupied by the Arab Republic of Egypt. Egypt became the first African country to establish diplomatic relations with the Republic of Belarus. This happened on 1 February 1992 [6]. In 1997, an embassy was opened in Cairo, which became *the first* diplomatic mission of Belarus in Africa.

In the period of 2013–2018 the only Belarusian embassy in East Africa was located in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (diplomatic relations have existed since May 1994)⁴. The opening of the diplomatic mission was due, among other things, to the location of the headquarters of the African Union in the capital of this country, Addis Ababa. However, in 2018, the Belarusian embassy was moved from Ethiopia to the Republic of Kenya (diplomatic relations were established on 17 November 1993), which could be explained by the more convenient geographic location of Kenya for making contacts with other countries in the region.

In West Africa, the Federal Republic of Nigeria was selected as the priority partner state. Belarus established diplomatic relations with this African country on 3 August 1992. In South Africa, the Republic of South Africa became the reference point of the Republic of Belarus (diplomatic relations have existed since 4 March 1993).

Table 1

Belarusian embassies in Africa

State	Embassy opening date	Concurrent accreditation
Arab Republic of Egypt	August 1997	Sudan, Algeria
Republic of South Africa	January 2000	Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia
Federal Republic of Nigeria	5 December 2011	Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon
Republic of Kenya	2018	Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda

Source: data of the embassies of the Republic of Belarus in African countries⁵.

Research reveals that the process of identifying the main partner states in Africa was rather complicated. For instance, the expectation of the active development

of cooperation through the African Union, as well as with Ethiopia, was not fully justified. After the opening of the Belarusian embassy in Addis Ababa in 2013 and

³Foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.mfa.gov.by/foreign_policy/ (date of access: 31.12.2019).

⁴Беларусь закрывает посольство в Эфиопии и открывает в Кении [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.belnovosti.by/politika/belarus-zakryvaet-posolstvo-v-efiopii-no-otkryvaet-v-kenii> (дата обращения: 21.12.2019).

⁵Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy> (date of access: 09.09.2019) ; Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Kenya [Electronic resource]. URL: http://kenya.mfa.gov.by/en/bilateral_relations/ (date of access: 01.05.2019) ; Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Federal Republic of Nigeria [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/en/> (date of access: 16.09.2019) ; Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 06.08.2020).



the visit of deputy foreign minister of the Republic of Belarus V. Rybakov (October 2014) to Ethiopia, there was a noticeable increase in the Belarusian-Ethiopian trade turnover. Thus, in 2015, it more than tripled (to 12.5 mln US dollars) compared to 2014 (3.7 mln US dollars). However, in 2016, trade with Ethiopia decreased to the level of 2014 (4 mln US dollars)⁶ and subsequently did not show positive dynamics.

The small number of Belarusian missions and embassy staff was a serious limitation for the Belarusian diplomatic presence in Africa. The number of the embassy staff was clearly insufficient in terms of the size of the countries and regions covered, the specifics of work in Africa, as well as the list of tasks assigned to the embassies to increase Belarusian exports. For instance, the total population of 4 African states (Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire) was about 275 mln people, while the Belarusian embassy in Nigeria, working with these countries, had only 4 diplomats on staff (including ambassador)⁷.

A similar situation was observed in the Republic of South Africa. The Embassy of Belarus consisted of 5 employees (including the ambassador), and the total population of South Africa and 4 countries of accreditation exceeded 135 mln people. In addition, this embassy oversaw cooperation with almost all major countries that belonged to the subregion of South Africa⁸.

It is worth mentioning that "great powers" such as the Russian Federation and the French Republic were represented at the embassy level in 40 and 45 African countries, respectively. Over the past few years, the Russian Federation has become an increasingly active player on the African continent, constantly expanding its political and military presence [8]. At this stage, Russia is seriously competing with China and Western countries for influence in Africa. As for the Russian diplomatic missions, most of them "inherited" from the USSR and have been functioning in Africa since the middle of the 20th century.

France was a major colonial power on the African continent in the 19th–20th centuries, which traditionally influenced the policy of African states, especially their former colonies. This explains the creation of an extensive network of French diplomatic missions in Africa⁹.

Belarus is not able to maintain such broad embassy networks as France or Russia due to the lack of resour-

ces. However, the activities of other states in Africa such as Poland and Ukraine can be more relevant.

In addition to Egypt, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, the embassies of these two Belarusian neighbors are located in other states such as Senegal and Ethiopia. Also, Poland and Ukraine have a fairly wide representation in the countries of North Africa. Currently, the embassies of Poland and Ukraine are functioning in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia. Poland is also represented at the embassy level in Angola and Tanzania. In general, the experience of Poland and Ukraine can be useful in planning the further advancement of Belarus in Africa.

Since 2010, Belarus has opened two new diplomatic missions in this region. In addition to the opening of missions, the process of establishing diplomatic relations with countries that in previous decades were out of sight of Belarusian diplomacy continued. The Republic of Belarus established diplomatic relations with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2010), the Republic of Niger and the Central African Republic (2012), the Republic of South Sudan and the Republic of Djibouti (2013). In general, as of 2020, Minsk had diplomatic relations with 48 out of 54 African states¹⁰.

In turn, foreign missions of three African states operate in the capital of Belarus: the embassies of the State of Libya (opened on 1 April 2001), the Republic of Sudan, as well as a branch of the South African Embassy (operating since 2008)¹¹. The Libyan embassy in Belarus is headed by the Charge d'Affaires, and the department of the South African embassy is headed by the head of the department of the embassy. As for the Sudanese embassy, there is the ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary in Belarus. It should be noted that the embassies of Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya (key partners of Belarus in Africa) are concurrently accredited in Minsk.

It needs to mention that most of the diplomatic missions of African states are accredited in Belarus concurrently from the Russian Federation (Moscow). These are the embassies of Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burundi, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Egypt, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea. The exception is the embassy of Burkina Faso, accredited concurrently in the Republic of Belarus, located in Berlin¹².

The institution of honorary consuls is widely used to establish bilateral contacts. The interests of the Re-

⁶Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Kenya [Electronic resource]. URL: http://kenya.mfa.gov.by/en/bilateral_relations/ (date of access: 01.05.2019).

⁷Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Federal Republic of Nigeria [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/en/> (date of access: 16.09.2019).

⁸Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 06.08.2020).

⁹Ambassades de France en Afrique [Ressource électronique]. URL: <https://lannuaire.service-public.fr/ambassades/afrique> (date de la demande: 18.04.2020).

¹⁰Belarus and countries of Africa and Middle East [Electronic resource]. URL: https://mfa.gov.by/countries_regions/africa_middle_east/ (date of access: 18.04.2020).

¹¹Diplomatic reference book [Electronic resource]. URL: http://mfa.gov.by/upload/20.02.02_handbook.pdf (date of access: 11.11.2019).

¹²Embassies accredited in the Republic of Belarus concurrently [Electronic resource]. URL: http://cnp.by/ref-foreign_embassies.html (date of access: 15.10.2020).



public of Belarus were defended by honorary consuls in Ghana, Cameroon, Namibia, Morocco, Nigeria and Sudan¹³. In the Republic of Belarus, the honorary consuls of the Republic of South Africa, the Republic of the Congo, and Zimbabwe carried out their activities¹⁴.

The intensity of exchanges of official representatives within the framework of working and official visits is generally measured as one of the most important countable criteria for assessing the activity of interstate political contacts. Generally, during such visits, promising and mutually beneficial agreements were discussed and concluded. Thus, out of 15 countries studied by the authors, the Arab Republic of Egypt stood out in terms of the rate and level of visits. In a short time, three visits were made to this country only at the highest level (June 1998, January 2017, February 2020)¹⁵.

While visiting Egypt in January 2017, president of Belarus A. Lukashenko held direct negotiations with president of Egypt A. F. al-Sisi in Cairo. It was stated that Belarus supports Egypt's desire to create a free trade zone with the EAEU. Another important topic of the talks between the leaders of the two countries was cooperation in the international arena, where Belarus and Egypt share the same views on most issues of the international agenda¹⁶. According to Belarusian experts in the field of international relations, in particular R. Turarbekova, A. Lukashenko's visit to Egypt and Sudan in 2017 "fits into the global trend of the revival of interest in Africa" [9].

In June 2019, the president of Egypt paid a return visit to Belarus, during which a package of documents on bilateral cooperation was signed and a roadmap for the development of relations for the next few years was adopted¹⁷.

It can be concluded that the personal relations between the leaders of the two countries became one of the factors that stimulated the development of bilateral relations. This can also be seen in economic indicators. For example, the trade turnover between Belarus and Egypt increased from 57.8 to 108.7 mln US dollars between 2016 and 2018, and Belarusian exports to this country almost doubled over 2 years (from 43.35 to 83.04 mln US dollars)¹⁸. Then, the trade with Egypt reached 145.4 mln US dollars in 2019, which formed

about a quarter of the total Belarusian turnover with the countries of the continent¹⁹.

The intensification of the Belarusian-Egyptian contacts had a positive impact on other spheres of interaction, including the development of cultural ties. For example, days of culture of the two countries were held. In 2017, Egypt was first presented at the international festival "Slavianski Bazar in Vitebsk". In July 2019, the Belarusian-Egyptian week of friendship and sports was held, during which teams of boxers and wrestlers from Egypt visited Belarus to conduct training camps and participate in competitions²⁰.

In addition to meetings at the highest level, Egypt was visited by the deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus (1996), Minister of foreign affairs (1998, 1999, 2006, 2009), Minister of industry (2017, 2019), Minister of agriculture and food (2017), Minister of natural resources and environmental protection (2017), Minister of antimonopoly regulation and trade (2003, 2016, 2018), Minister of communications and informatization (2018), Minister of culture (2004, 2008), Minister of internal affairs (2006), chairman of the State Committee for Science and Technology (2000), deputy chairman of the State Committee for Military Problems (2015, 2018, 2019) and other Belarusian officials²¹.

Many Egyptian officials paid visits to Belarus: Minister of foreign affairs (2017), Minister of trade and industry (2014, 2017), Minister of transport (2017), Minister of state for defense industry (2017), deputy Minister of foreign affairs (1997, 2005, 2009), Governor of the Governorate of South Sinai (2016), Governor of Wadi El Gedi Governorate (2018), Chairman of the Planning and Budgeting Commission of the People's Assembly (2002), first deputy Minister of foreign trade (1999, 2003), deputy Minister of communications and information technology (2018), President of the Egyptian Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (2004, 2017), etc.²²

On 14–17 November 2018, the visit of the Chairman of the Egyptian parliament was organized to Belarus.

In addition to official and working visits, the foreign ministries of Belarus and Egypt practiced regular political consultations at the level of deputy foreign ministers (five rounds were held).

¹³Belarus and countries of Africa and Middle East [Electronic resource]. URL: https://mfa.gov.by/countries_regions/africa_middle_east (date of access: 17.10.2020).

¹⁴Diplomatic reference book [Electronic resource]. URL: http://mfa.gov.by/upload/20.02.02_handbook.pdf (date of access: 11.11.2019).

¹⁵Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 09.09.2019).

¹⁶Переговоры с президентом Египта Абдель Фаттахом аль-Сиси [Электронный ресурс]. URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/ofitsialnyj-vizit-v-arabskuju-respubliku-egipet-15375/ (дата обращения: 12.12.2019).

¹⁷Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 09.09.2019).

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Сможет ли Африка заменить Белоруссии Россию [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://eadaaily.com/ru/news/2020/02/22/smozhet-li-afrika-zametit-belorussii-rossiyu> (дата обращения: 09.05.2020).

²⁰Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 09.09.2019).

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.



Consultations of the Belarusian foreign ministry with its partners were also held in Ethiopia (October 2014), in Algeria (April 2015). In April 2016, the first round of the Belarusian-Ghanaian consultations took place in Accra (Ghana) between the ministries of foreign affairs. In August 2018, the second round of the Belarusian-Ghanaian consultations between the ministries of foreign affairs was organized in Minsk²³. Political consultations were not limited to this list of countries.

The creation of intergovernmental commissions for trade and economic cooperation has become a traditional form of interaction between Belarus and foreign states, including African ones. In November 2000, there was a decision to establish a Belarusian-Libyan Joint Commission on Economic, Trade and Scientific-Technical Cooperation between the Governments of Belarus and Libya. Its first meeting took place in 2002, the second – in 2004, and the third – in 2009 [7].

Similar commissions began to operate with Egypt (November 2018), South Africa (March 2018), as well as with other countries²⁴.

Experts noted that exchanges of high-level visits with African states as a whole were organized even more often than with countries of the collective West. Not only the meetings of the leaders of Belarus and Egypt were organized, but also high-level visits were held between Belarus and Libya (2000, 2008) [7]. In 2000, the President of the Republic of Uganda J. Museveni visited the Republic of Belarus²⁵. We should also mention the visits to Minsk of the President of the Republic of Sudan O. al-Bashir (August 2004, December 2018)²⁶, the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe E. Mnangagwa (January 2019).

Belarus intensively exchanged visits with other countries of the African continent. In July – August 2013, the first State Minister of foreign affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria V. Onvuliri paid a visit to Belarus. Meetings were held with the head of the Belarusian foreign ministry V. Makei and his deputy V. Rybakov. What is more, V. Onvuliri attended large industrial enterprises of Belarus (holding “Minsk Tractor Works” (MTW), OJSC “MAZ”), as well as the Belarusian State University.

In September 2014, the return visit to Nigeria of the Minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Belarus V. Makei took place. The Belarusian delegation included representatives of a number of enterprises, including MAZ and MTW. During the meeting of V. Makei with the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria G. Jonathan, the issues of enhancing bilateral ties in the political, trade-economic, military-technical and other fields were discussed²⁷.

In April 2016, the second round of Belarusian-Nigerian political consultations was held in Abuja with the participation of deputy foreign minister of Belarus V. Rybakov²⁸.

A regular dialogue is maintained between the foreign ministries of Belarus and the Republic of South Africa. The foreign ministers of Belarus visited this country in 2000, 2006, 2014²⁹.

The Minister of international relations and cooperation of South Africa N. Dlamini-Zuma paid a visit to Belarus in 2007 and in 2008. It should be added that in 2007 she was awarded the title of Honorary professor of the BSU. In September 2013, the Minister of international relations and cooperation of South Africa M. Nkoana-Mashabane had an official visit to Belarus³⁰.

In 2006, Belarus was visited by the Chairman of the South African National Assembly B. Mbete, in 2007 – the Chairman of the South African National Council of Provinces M. Mahlangu.

Our country was also visited by the king of the province of KwaZulu-Natal (1999), chief of Staff of the President of South Africa and Minister of arts, science and technology (2002), Minister of state enterprises (2006), Minister of mineral resources and energy (2007)³¹.

Attempts to establish cooperation between the regions of the two states should also be taken into consideration. As part of the development of regional cooperation in 2015–2016, there was an exchange of visits between the Minsk region and the Free State province, and a memorandum on regional cooperation was signed³².

Major economic events were often planned as part of the visits of high-ranking officials. Thus, during a visit to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

²³Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 09.09.2019) ; Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Federal Republic of Nigeria [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/en/> (date of access: 16.09.2019).

²⁴Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 09.09.2019) ; Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 06.08.2020).

²⁵Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Kenya [Electronic resource]. URL: http://kenya.mfa.gov.by/en/bilateral_relations/ (date of access: 01.05.2019).

²⁶Президент Судана Омар аль-Башир прибыл с визитом в Беларусь [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://ont.by/news/prezident-sudana-omar-al-bashir-pribyl-s-vizitom-v-belarus> (дата доступа: 01.02.2020).

²⁷Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Federal Republic of Nigeria [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/en/> (date of access: 16.09.2019).

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 16.09.2019).

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.



(13–15 October 2014), deputy foreign minister of Belarus V. Rybakov, not only the first round of consultations between the foreign ministries of the two countries was organized, but also a business forum was held at the site of the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Industry³³.

The Algerian People's Democratic Republic was visited by the Minister of defense (2002, 2005), the Minister of foreign affairs (2003), the Minister of industry (2018), a delegation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food of the Republic of Belarus (2009)³⁴.

In 2003 the Minister of industry of Algeria visited Belarus. On 19–21 February 2018, for the first time in the history of bilateral relations, the foreign minister of Algeria visited our country.

The exchange of direct visits at the highest and high levels was complemented by bilateral meetings within the framework of international events. Although this mechanism of political dialogue was less costly, on the other hand, it was largely formal in nature, represented a short-term exchange of “diplomatic courtesies”, served to create a “picture” of foreign policy activity, rather than for real agreements.

The annual sessions of the UN General Assembly have become a popular platform for meetings of high-level representatives. In September 2000, at the UN millennium summit, a meeting was organized between the president of Belarus and the president of Algeria. Also, in September 2015, at the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, A. Lukashenko met in New York with his Egyptian counterpart A. F. al-Sisi.

The Minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Belarus and his colleagues also frequently used international platforms for working meetings. For example, the foreign ministers of Belarus and Angola met within the framework of the UN General Assembly in 2016³⁵, in September 2019, on the sidelines of this forum, a meeting was held between the foreign ministers of Belarus and Sudan³⁶.

With the aim of expanding its presence in the countries of the “far arc”, including on the African continent,

Minsk made a “non-standard foreign policy decision” to join the Non-Aligned Movement in 1998, which caused a surprise among its European partners.

At the Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in September 2006, which took place in Havana, the Belarusian president met with his counterpart from Kenya U. Kenyatta³⁷. The second meeting of the leaders of Belarus and Kenya was also organized in May 2017 at the international platform at the international forum “One Belt, One Road” (Beijing, China).

Participation in the activities of the Non-Aligned Movement gave a good reason for bilateral meetings of the official representatives of the partner countries. Thus, during the jubilee ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade, dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the organization, in September 2011, a meeting of the Minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Belarus S. Martynov and Minister of state for foreign affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria V. Onvuliri. Deputy Minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Belarus S. Aleinik met with Nigerian foreign minister V. Onvuliri within the framework of another summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Sharm-el-Sheikh (May 2012)³⁸.

The Munich international conference on security issues, traditionally held annually in February, was rich in the meetings of the Belarusian foreign minister with the heads of the foreign affairs agencies of African countries. On the margins of the conference, in particular, the head of the foreign ministry of Belarus met with colleagues from Egypt (2015, 2017, 2018)³⁹, Kenya (2015)⁴⁰. In February 2016, the foreign ministers of Belarus (V. Makei) and Ghana (H. Tette) held a meeting in Munich⁴¹.

The Belarusian foreign ministry has repeatedly made attempts to interact with regional structures in Africa. Among the most important events in the Belarusian-Pan-African relations, one can single out the official visit to Belarus of the African Union delegation headed by the Chairman of the African Union Commission N. Dlamini-Zuma (21–24 April 2016)⁴².

³³Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Kenya [Electronic resource]. URL: http://kenya.mfa.gov.by/en/bilateral_relations/ (date of access: 01.05.2020).

³⁴Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 09.09.2019).

³⁵Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 06.08.2020).

³⁶Обзор итогов внешней политики Республики Беларусь и деятельности Министерства иностранных дел в 2019 году [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.by/publication/reports/d850d69242f0c67a.html> (дата обращения: 10.04.2020).

³⁷Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Kenya [Electronic resource]. URL: http://kenya.mfa.gov.by/en/bilateral_relations/ (date of access: 01.05.2020).

³⁸Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Federal Republic of Nigeria [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/en/> (date of access: 16.09.2019).

³⁹Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 09.09.2019).

⁴⁰Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Kenya [Electronic resource]. URL: http://kenya.mfa.gov.by/en/bilateral_relations/ (date of access: 01.05.2020).

⁴¹Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Federal Republic of Nigeria [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/en/> (date of access: 16.09.2019).

⁴²The President of the African Union Commission visits Belarus [Electronic resource]. URL: http://mfa.gov.by/en/press/news_mfa/a1c0cf699da83a40.html (date of access: 03.04.2020).



During the visit, the representatives of the African Union noted that Belarusian export goods may be in great demand in African countries. An agreement was reached to intensify cooperation in the fields of agriculture, industry, education, health protection, as well as in the field of joint fight against cross-border crime. They also discussed the initiative on the exchange of technological information for better realization of the potential of Belarusian exports in the African region and the creation of new forms of economic cooperation and the presence of Belarus in Africa.

As a result of the visit, a Memorandum of understanding was signed between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and the African Union Commission, which envisaged the creation of a mechanism for political consultations as a basis for further expansion of comprehensive cooperation.

However, it is necessary to note that the chairman of the African Union Commission did not have meetings with the president and prime minister of Belarus, and the visit itself was not widely covered in the Belarusian official media, which, according to the authors of the work, was a signal of the fact that Minsk did not count on the real content of cooperation with the African Union, there was a certain disappointment in relation to prospects of cooperation with Africa.

During the aforementioned visit to Belarus (April 2016) of the African Union delegation headed by the Chairman of the African Union Commission N. Dlamini-Zuma, the interest of the representatives of African states in the development of cooperation in education and science was indicated. In order to study the prospects for cooperation, the delegation of the African Union visited the Belarusian State University, where they met with representatives of the academic circles of Belarus, in particular, with the dean of the faculty of international relations V. Shadursky. However, no concrete actions followed in this direction either.

As for the events with the participation of official representatives of Belarus and representatives of African trade and economic circles and business communities, we can mention the meeting of the president of the Republic of Belarus A. Lukashenko with the president of the Bank for Trade and Development of Eastern and Southern Africa A. Tadesse in April 2014.

Belarus continued to count on using the Memorandum of understanding between the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and the African Union Commission (AUC) in the field of economic cooperation, signed on 24 October 2019, to expand cooperation⁴³.

As this study illustrates, the organization of visits, especially at the highest level, demanded serious financial expenditures, preparation and elaboration of possible areas of cooperation.

However, the official visits did not always meet the expectations for the active development of cooperation with African partners. For example, we can say that Belarus' plans on the development of dynamic cooperation with Mozambique did not come true. To be more specific, there were active political contacts at various levels with this state in 2013–2014. However, Belarusian exports to Mozambique, since 2014, have not exceeded 1.8 mln US dollars, and imports have been very insignificant⁴⁴.

As already noted, bilateral relations depended on many factors, primarily the unstable and unpredictable internal political situation in some African countries. For instance, the active development of dialogue with Libya in the 2000s, good personal and partnership relations of the leadership was interrupted by the overthrow of the leader of this country M. Gaddafi in 2011⁴⁵. Political turbulence in this African country soon led to the closure (December 2014) of the Belarusian embassy in Tripoli, which opened in early 2001.

A similar situation has developed in relations with the Republic of Sudan, where, as indicated earlier, the head of the Belarusian state paid a visit in 2017, and president of the Sudan O. al-Bashir, paid a return visit to Belarus in December 2018⁴⁶. However, the dismissal of O. al-Bashir from office in April 2019 led to a temporary suspension of the implementation of a series of joint projects and required Minsk to establish relations with the new leadership of Sudan.

It is important to state that most of the official events (visits, meetings at the highest and high levels) were usually timed to coincide with the signing or, as a rule, end with the adoption of final documents: memorandums, declarations, agreements, contracts, etc.

Expansion of the legal framework of relations between the Republic of Belarus and its African partners was indicated as a promising mission of Belarusian diplomacy. The legal framework of Belarus – Egypt bilateral relations is the most developed. It currently consists of 50 international treaties, including the Agreement on the basics of relations and cooperation, the Agreement on economic and scientific and technical cooperation, the Trade agreement, the Agreement on assistance to implementation and mutual protection of investments, avoidance of double taxation, cooperation in science, culture, technology, as well as the Agreement on co-

⁴³The EEC and the African Union Commission signed a Memorandum of understanding [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/24-10-2019-5.aspx> (date of access: 16.02.2020).

⁴⁴Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 06.08.2020).

⁴⁵У Беларусі і Лівіі единство підходів к формированню справедливого многополярного мира [Електронний ресурс]. URL: http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/u-belarusi-i-livii-edinstvo-podkhodov-k-formirovaniyu-spravedlivogo-mnogopoljarnogo-mira-2874/ (дата обращения: 24.06.2020).

⁴⁶Президент Судана Омар аль-Башир прибыл с визитом в Беларусь [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://ont.by/news/prezident-sudana-omar-al-bashir-pribyl-s-vizitom-v-belarus> (дата обращения: 01.02.2020).



operation in combating crime and on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, the Agreement on cooperation and mutual assistance in customs matters⁴⁷.

The legal framework of relations with the Republic of South Africa includes intergovernmental agreements on trade and economic cooperation, on scientific and technical cooperation, on military-technical cooperation, on the avoidance of double taxation, as well as on visa-free travel on diplomatic and service passports, on cooperation in the field of culture and art. There is an Agreement on the establishment of the Committee for Trade and Economic Cooperation. Draft agreements on mutual legal assistance in criminal cases have been agreed and initialed⁴⁸.

Today, the legal framework of relations between the Republic of Belarus and African states is still at the

stage of formation. At the same time, the pace of its development in relation to the African region lags behind the indicators characterizing the intensity of the formation of the regulatory and legal foundation with other regions of the world. For example, in 2019, our country signed 88 bilateral international treaties: with the CIS states (29), the states of Asia (25), Europe (14), Africa (6), North America (5), and South America (1)⁴⁹.

However, it can be said that the agreements concluded were not fulfilled in many respects. Partners were offered a standard set of actions, very often without country-specific considerations. The negotiations were mostly not conducted by specific executors of potential joint projects, but led by ministries and departments that do not know the specific details of the planned cooperation.

Economic and humanitarian cooperation

As already noted, the expansion of political and diplomatic contacts between Belarus and African countries had the main objective of *creating favorable conditions for increasing the volume of Belarusian exports*. More precisely, Belarus primarily focused on supplies of the production of a large machine-building complex to Africa.

Since the 2010s, the African region has started being considered as one of the most important areas of the “far arc” of Belarusian diplomacy, which was confirmed by ambitious plans to increase trade with this region⁵⁰.

The first Belarusian-African forum “Belarus and Africa: new horizons” (6–7 June 2017) was a notable event, which attracted a serious interest of representatives of African states. The event was attended by officials and representatives of business communities from over 20 African countries: heads of ministries, large companies and banks, businessmen. The delegation of partners was headed by the president of Afreximbank, Dr. B. Orama⁵¹.

According to some parameters, the “three-thirds” Belarus export strategy was completed. As an example, we can cite foreign trade statistics in 2018, when our country approached the achievement of the goal of

export diversification: the share of the EAEU in total exports was 41.2 %, the EU – 30.2 %, other countries – 28.6 %⁵².

In the first half of 2019, the EAEU dimension dominated in the structure of Belarusian exports (including Russia – 40.3 % of all Belarusian exports), the share of exports to the EU dropped to 27.1 %. The rest of the export share fell on the countries of the “far arc”, including African⁵³.

The economic hardships that the African region countries experience is a serious obstacle. One of the most problematic issues is the financial support of Belarusian exports – many African states are not able to pay for Belarusian products with “cash”, despite the availability of significant raw materials.

From the practical results of this forum, one can single out the signing of the Framework agreement between the Development Bank of the Republic of Belarus and the African Export-Import Bank on 150 mln US dollars for the purchase of Belarusian commodities by African companies⁵⁴.

At the end of 2016, Belarusian exports amounted to 442 mln US dollars, or 0.05 % of total world exports to Africa, and exports of African countries to Belarus –

⁴⁷Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 09.09.2019).

⁴⁸Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 06.08.2020).

⁴⁹Обзор итогов внешней политики Республики Беларусь и деятельности Министерства иностранных дел в 2019 году [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.by/publication/reports/d850d69242f0c67a.html> (дата обращения: 10.04.2020).

⁵⁰Беларусь и страны Африки планируют нарастить товарооборот до \$3 млрд к 2020 году [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <http://www.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-i-strany-afriki-planirujut-narastit-tovarooborot-do-3-mlrd-k-2020-godu-251226-2017/> (дата обращения: 29.10.2019).

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Обзор итогов внешней политики Республики Беларусь и деятельности Министерства иностранных дел в 2018 году [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <http://www.mfa.gov.by/publication/reports/b7fe6b330b96c9b7.html> (дата обращения: 29.03.2020).

⁵³Foreign trade of Belarus in the first half of the year [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://mfa.gov.by/export/> (date of access: 06.07.2020).

⁵⁴Minsk hosted the first Belarusian-African forum [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://export.by/news/the-first-belarusian-african-forum-was-held-in-minsk> (date of access: 10.10.2019).



152 mln US dollars⁵⁵. Despite such indicators, an ambitious goal was set – to bring the trade turnover between Belarus and African states to 3 bln US dollars by 2020. From the point of view of a range of experts, this is a complicated task, since the amount of 2–3 bln US dollars of Belarusian-African trade can be cumulatively collected over the past 10 years⁵⁶.

To make the presence of Belarus in African markets more efficient, the Belarusian side tried to move from a simple export of goods and services to more advanced forms of cooperation: the opening of representative offices of Belarusian companies and the creation of joint ventures.

An advantage of the development of economic cooperation was that the Belarusian interest coincided with the interest of the economies of most African countries due to the complementarity of the economies.

However, long-term investments in the economies of African countries were associated with significant risks due to the unstable political and socio-economic situation on the continent.

Despite all the obstacles, the Republic of Belarus is working on cooperation with African states in various sectors.

For example, assembly facilities of Belarusian tractors and trucks have been operating in North African countries for several years. There was a work on the creation of a joint manufacturing plant for “MAZ” (Belarusian enterprise that produces trucks) equipment with Algeria in 2019 [9]. Similar projects are being worked out in other countries: Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan⁵⁷.

In Nigeria, the process of creation of service stations and stores for spare parts has been launched by holding “MTW” (a Belarusian enterprise that produces tractors). It should be mentioned that in some regions of this West African country, Belarusian tractors have been operating since the 1980s. As a result, Belarusian products have been known in Africa since the USSR. At present, the Republic of Belarus seeks to create an

assembly facility for Belarusian tractor equipment in Nigeria, which in the future will cover not only this African country but also a number of others – Ghana, Senegal, Cote d’Ivoire, Cameroon, Mali⁵⁸.

The first Belarusian mining dump truck (BELAZ) arrived in South Africa back in 1991. The supply of heavy-duty BELAZ dump trucks to the African continent has intensified since 2010. In 2013 Belarus exported 17 BELAZ mining dump trucks to South Africa, which are actively used in the mining industry of this country. Also, at the beginning of 2016, 3 dump trucks BELAZ-75139 were delivered to the Republic of Angola, and specialists and operators of the SATOSA diamond mining enterprise were trained by specialists from OJSC “BELAZ”⁵⁹ (Belarusian enterprise that produces mining dump trucks).

Currently, the commodity distribution network of Belarusian enterprises in the Republic of South Africa includes representative offices of OJSC “MAZ” and holding “MTW”, the trading house of OJSC “Belshina” (Belarusian enterprise that produces tires), a dealer (certified service center) OJSC “BELAZ”⁶⁰.

In general, the export geography of OJSC “BELAZ” includes 12 African states⁶¹. The successful promotion of the Belarusian BELAZ dump trucks can be explained by their robust design, which makes it possible to operate even in the most difficult conditions, high reliability and efficiency of equipment, as well as low fuel consumption, compared to the analogues of manufacturers from other countries⁶².

In March 2016, a representative office of OJSC “MAZ” was opened in Egypt. In 2018–2019, a series of joint projects in the field of mechanical engineering and scientific and technical cooperation were actively implemented on the territory of this North African country⁶³.

In East Africa, agreements were signed with Kenya (2019) on the construction of a reinforced concrete plant and a fish farm⁶⁴.

African states were also interested in other sectors of the economy, including the experience of Belarus in

⁵⁵Minsk hosted the first Belarusian-African forum [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://export.by/news/the-first-belarusian-african-forum-was-held-in-minsk> (date of access: 10.10.2019).

⁵⁶Сможет ли Африка заменить Белоруссии Россию? [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2020/02/22/smozhet-li-afrika-zametit-belorussii-rossiyu> (дата обращения: 22.01.2020).

⁵⁷Minsk hosted the first Belarusian-African forum [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://export.by/news/the-first-belarusian-african-forum-was-held-in-minsk> (date of access: 10.10.2019).

⁵⁸Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Federal Republic of Nigeria [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/en/> (date of access: 16.09.2019).

⁵⁹Белорусская техника и продукты питания впервые представлены в Судане [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.belinterexpo.by/about/news/beloruskaya-tehnika-i-produkty-pitaniya-vpervye-predstavleny-v-sudane/> (дата обращения: 05.07.2020).

⁶⁰Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 06.08.2020).

⁶¹Белорусская техника и продукты питания впервые представлены в Судане [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.belinterexpo.by/about/news/beloruskaya-tehnika-i-produkty-pitaniya-vpervye-predstavleny-v-sudane/> (дата обращения: 05.07.2020).

⁶²Карьерные самосвалы БелАЗ набирают популярность в ЮАР [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.abw.by/novosti/commercial/159471> (дата обращения: 11.04.2020).

⁶³Обзор итогов внешней политики Республики Беларусь и деятельности Министерства иностранных дел в 2019 году [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.by/publication/reports/d850d69242f0c67a.html> (дата обращения: 10.04.2020).

⁶⁴Ibid.



the field of agriculture, as well as the import of Belarusian weapons systems.

The dynamics of Belarus' foreign trade with African states is the most objective indicator of the effectiveness of the "economic diplomacy" strategy and demonstrates a set of patterns in the area of economic cooperation.

In general, it should be noted that statistics on trade and economic cooperation between Belarus and partner states in Africa are presented on the websites of the National Statistical Committee of Belarus (Belstat),

as well as on the websites of Belarusian embassies in African countries.

Attention should be paid to the fact that the websites of the Belarusian embassies have more detailed information on trade and economic cooperation between Belarus and African countries for 2014–2019 than for earlier periods.

Relevant information on the trade and economic cooperation of the Republic of Belarus and its "reference points" in Africa is contained in tables 2–5.

Table 2

**Dynamics of trade between the Republic of Belarus
and the Arab Republic of Egypt in 2014–2020, mln US dollars**

Year	Commodity turnover	Export	Import	Balance
2014	156.45	134.10	22.35	131.68
2015	186.34	98.01	88.32	9.69
2016	57.80	43.35	14.45	28.90
2017	97.46	76.12	21.34	54.78
2018	108.70	83.04	25.03	58.10
2019	142.37	116.46	25.88	90.60
January – November 2020	68.78	51.02	17.76	33.25

Source: data of the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt⁶⁵.

Table 3

**Dynamics of trade between the Republic of Belarus
and the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2014–2020, mln US dollars**

Year	Commodity turnover	Export	Import	Balance
2014	27.40	20.90	6.50	14.40
2015	33.70	30.50	3.20	27.30
2016	19.30	10.10	9.20	0.90
2017	27.00	22.00	5.00	17.00
2018	38.80	31.00	7.80	23.20
2019	11.80	9.50	2.30	7.20
January – November 2020	6.18	4.17	2.01	2.16

Source: data of the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Federal Republic of Nigeria⁶⁶.

Table 4

**Dynamics of trade between the Republic of Belarus
and the Republic of Kenya in 2014–2020, mln US dollars**

Year	Commodity turnover	Export	Import	Balance
2014	17.00	13.80	3.20	10.60
2015	14.00	3.30	10.80	–7.50
2016	18.20	1.90	16.30	–14.40
2017	35.20	1.60	33.60	–32.00

⁶⁵Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/> (date of access: 16.09.2019).

⁶⁶Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Federal Republic of Nigeria [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/en/> (date of access: 16.09.2019).



Ending table 4

Year	Commodity turnover	Export	Import	Balance
2018	49.40	3.10	46.30	–43.20
2019	42.90	3.80	39.10	–35.30
January – November 2020	38.07	5.49	32.58	–27.09

Source: data of the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Kenya⁶⁷.

Table 5

**Dynamics of trade between the Republic of Belarus
and the Republic of South Africa in 2014–2020, mln US dollars**

Year	Commodity turnover	Export	Import	Balance
2014	57.97	40.60	17.36	23.24
2015	129.77	7.02	122.74	–115.71
2016	9.63	3.28	6.35	–3.07
2017	16.76	9.25	7.50	1.74
2018	24.90	17.17	7.73	9.44
2019	26.79	14.51	12.27	2.24
January – November 2020	24.54	17.34	7.19	10.14

Source: data of the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa⁶⁸.

As follows from the statistics presented, the trade turnover with African countries had an *intermittent nature*. The increase in exports to Africa is unstable, uneven, inconsistent, and is associated with the signing of major contracts (often with the participation of the highest officials of states).

Secondly, the trade turnover was unbalanced. Most African states experienced insignificant imports to the Republic of Belarus with relatively high exports to these countries, which did not suit African partners. In addition to the data presented in the tables, trade with Angola can be taken as an example of such a situation. Belarusian exports to this African country in 2016–2018 amounted to 162.96 mln US dollars in the absence of information on imports⁶⁹. On the other hand, in the case of, for example, Kenya, a negative foreign trade balance has been observed over the past several years⁷⁰.

To highlight the most sustainable and stable trading partners in the region, it is important to analyze the quantitative indicators of Belarusian exports to various African states in recent years. These indicators are reflected in figure.

The figure shows 17 states – major trade partners of the Republic of Belarus on the continent. Less significant trading partners such as Mozambique, Libya, Tanzania and others are not represented. Exports to some

countries, such as Zimbabwe, were quite volatile. For example, in January – November 2020, it amounted to more than 21.5 mln US dollars, which is 84 times more than in the corresponding period in 2019.

Obviously, the most significant partner in terms of Belarusian exports remains the Arab Republic of Egypt. Out of 1927.3 mln US dollars – the total amount of Belarusian exports to most African countries over 6 years (2014–2019), 551.2 mln US dollars or 28.5 % were exports to Egypt. Possible insignificant distortions in the general statistics for the period under review (2014–2019) do not affect the overall statistics of Belarusian exports to African states.

It should also be noted that the Belarusian export figures to certain African countries such as Angola, Morocco, Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire exceed those in South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya – the countries where the embassies of the Republic of Belarus are located. On the other hand, this situation can be explained by the implementation of a number of large contracts in various spheres (mainly in the military) in some African states during the analyzed period.

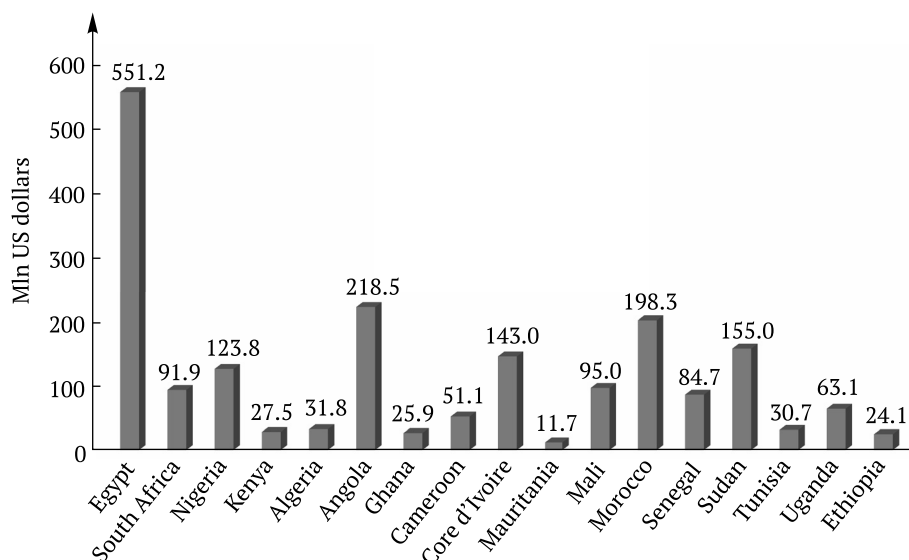
In general, there is a positive, albeit relatively unstable, dynamics of foreign trade of the Republic of Belarus with African states. Moreover, there is a tendency to an increase in the number of partner states to which Belarusian products are actively sold.

⁶⁷Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Kenya [Electronic resource]. URL: http://kenya.mfa.gov.by/en/bilateral_relations/ (date of access: 01.05.2020).

⁶⁸Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of South Africa [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://rsa.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 06.08.2020).

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Kenya [Electronic resource]. URL: http://kenya.mfa.gov.by/en/bilateral_relations/ (date of access: 01.05.2020).



Export of the Republic of Belarus
to certain African states 2014–2019
Source: data of Belstat⁷¹

The Republic of Belarus has developed military-technical cooperation with African partners since 1990s. As a result military production became an important part of Belarusian exports to Africa. This is clearly visible from the example of Belarusian exports to certain developing states and regions, in particular, to Africa. It should be stated that after the collapse of the USSR in 1992, a certain surplus number of weapons remained on the territory of Belarus, which formed the basis of exports in the 1990s – 2000s to Africa and other regions of the world. Subsequently, Belarus began to export its own samples in the military sphere.

A similar situation was typical for our neighboring states in the post-Soviet space – Ukraine and Russia. Belarus had a certain degree of cooperation and competition with these countries in the supply of weapons systems to Africa.

As for the Russian Federation, it pursues in Africa not only economic but also geopolitical goals, through economic support of different African states, the export of weapons systems, the development of military-technical cooperation and sending of its military advisers⁷². In recent years, Russia has accounted for 35 % of all arms exports to Africa, which makes it the leader in this indicator [10]. However, some Western analysts explain the effectiveness of Russian military exports (as well as Belarusian ones) by the absence of any “moral and ethical” preconditions and requirements for their partners on

the continent [10]. These requirements are democratic political regimes, respect for human rights and others.

It is noteworthy, that the export of military goods is a significant component of all Belarusian exports to the African continent. It is estimated that over the last 8 years Belarus has received about 500 mln US dollars in income from arms exports to Africa⁷³.

If we analyze the geography of Belarusian military exports to the African region, starting in 1992, we can say that initially the export was directed mainly to the Arab states of North Africa (as well as to the Middle East). In the late 1990s – early 2000s the Republic of Belarus has expanded the geography of arms exports, covering almost all regions of Africa.

Among other areas of military cooperation, one can single out consultations between representatives of the military departments of Belarus and African states, taking place in various formats. Also, Belarusian military personnel had limited participation in international peacekeeping missions in Africa⁷⁴.

It can even be assumed that there is potential for further expansion of military-technical cooperation.

Another promising area of Belarusian-African cooperation is education. Ever since the time of the BSSR, hundreds of students from African states of “socialist orientation” have studied in our country in higher education institutions, mainly in technical and medical specialties.

⁷¹Внешняя торговля [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/realny-sector-ekonomiki/vneshnyaya-torgovlya/> (дата обращения: 06.08.2020).

⁷²Russian journalists killed in Central African Republic [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://p.dw.com/p/32PPa> (date of access: 09.05.2020).

⁷³Сможет ли Африка заменить Белоруссии Россию [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://easaily.com/ru/news/2020/02/22/smozhet-li-afrika-zametit-belorussii-rossiyu> (дата обращения: 09.05.2020).

⁷⁴Синюк Е. Куда направляются белорусские миротворцы [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://news.tut.by/politics/257910.html> (дата обращения: 14.03.2020).



Despite the collapse of the USSR, contacts in the field of education have been preserved and further developed at the present stage. Currently, African countries' citizens study at Belarusian universities and often choose humanitarian specialties. For example, at the Belarusian State University, most scholars from Africa study at the faculty of international relations and the Institute of business. There are also African students at the Minsk State Linguistic University.

If we take quantitative indicators, it can be noted that in the 2015/2016 academic year 547 Nigerian students studied at the universities of Belarus, and in 2017/2018 there were 600 students⁷⁵. Moreover, the first students from this West African country appeared in Belarus in 1965⁷⁶. Also, there were trained more than 130 Egyptian specialists with higher education and 29 candidates of sciences in Belarusian universities in 1991–2019⁷⁷.

Conclusion

Thus, the cooperation between Belarus and African states acquired real contours in the researched period. A specific system of bilateral and multilateral interaction in the political and economic domains has been formed. Contacts at the highest and high levels were developed, which were often carried out within the framework of international organizations such as the UN and the Non-Aligned Movement, etc. However, these meetings were of an irregular nature, their effectiveness in most cases depended not only on the existing similar positions and good personal relations between the leaders of the countries but most importantly on real opportunities for cooperation.

Belarus and its African partners set the objective of expanding the legal framework of relations, marking its importance. For example, it can be noted that citizens of some African states have the opportunity, under certain conditions, to use visa-free entry to the Republic of Belarus through the Minsk National Airport. Insufficient analysis by the Belarusian side of the specific situation in African countries remained a serious problem. It should be improved with consistent adoption of *country* cooperation strategies (programs) based on a comprehensive study. The absence of such programs and documents led to the fact that optimistic declarations made after official visits, widely voiced in the state media, did not lead to real results.

In the area of economic cooperation, it should be pointed out that Minsk is striving for various forms of cooperation with African partners. Cooperation was mutually beneficial, which can be explained by the complementary nature of economies. At the same time, African states were also interested in developing relations with Belarus through the EAEU, which is also beneficial to our country.

Belarus can also use the platform and format of the EAEU to create and expand the legal framework with large integration entities in Africa, such as the Sou-

thern African Development Community (SADC), dominated by South Africa, and the Economic Community of West African Countries (ECOWAS), where Nigeria plays a key role, and others. This will allow Belarusian exporters to gain access to the markets of a large number of countries on the continent.

Summing up the *overall results*, it is necessary to note that Belarusian exports to Africa were unstable, intermittent, and the task of increasing the Belarusian-African trade turnover to 3 bln US dollars by 2020 was not fulfilled. The key problem in this area was the financial provision of Belarusian exports. In order to solve these issues, the Belarusian side needs to elaborate flexible payment schemes, as well as use the principle of barter services.

Belarus paid little attention to the involvement of small and medium-sized businesses in cooperation with African partners. These businesses can work not only alone, but also more successfully as part of associations, consortia, etc. It is common knowledge that small enterprises can normally demonstrate greater flexibility in providing in-demand services and supplying scarce commodities to foreign markets. However, during official visits, holding large exhibitions and fairs, foreign partners were offered primarily interaction with large machine-building enterprises. Without denying this practice, it is necessary to significantly expand the range of participants in foreign trade events.

Military-technical cooperation has traditionally been a successful domain of interaction between Belarus and African countries. The geography of Belarusian military exports to Africa included 12 states of the continent, in the 2010s multimillion-dollar contracts were implemented with various partners.

Cooperation in the field of education, science, culture has developed since the BSSR period. Nowadays, students from several African states (mainly from Egypt and Nigeria) are studying in the higher educa-

⁷⁵Беларусь – Нигерия: перспективы взаимодействия в сфере образования [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://edu.gov.by/news/belarus--nigeriya-perspektivy-vzaimodeystviya-v-sfere-obrazovaniya/> (дата обращения: 08.02.2020).

⁷⁶Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Federal Republic of Nigeria [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://nigeria.mfa.gov.by/en/> (date of access: 16.09.2019).

⁷⁷Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Arab Republic of Egypt [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://egypt.mfa.gov.by/en/embassy/> (date of access: 09.09.2019).



tional institutions of our country. A dialogue is maintained between the Belarusian-African scientific communities (mainly with Egypt).

The constraining factors are the remoteness of the territory of Belarus from the African continent, the com-

plexity of logistics, the high level of corruption in African states, and the difference in mentalities.

However, the presence of the aforementioned and other challenges does not reduce the prospects of the African dimension in Belarusian foreign policy.

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Received by editorial board 03.03.2021.