
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

UDC 327.7

BELARUS AT THE UNITED NATIONS: ASSESSING ITS POLITICAL TRACK RECORD

V. V. MAKEI^a

^a*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, 19 Lenina Street, Minsk 220030, Belarus*

There is much focus on the United Nations in 2020 as it celebrates its 75th anniversary, which, in turn, generates many expectations from the organization. The UN, however, can do only as much as it is allowed by its institutional building. In particular, it is much constrained to deliver on the so-called first-tier peace and security cluster, whereas it can do far more on the second-tier non-security issues. Belarus has been engaged with the UN since 1945 with a variable degree of success. Belarus' most conspicuous involvement in the United Nations has been taking place since 2005 as a result of its unifying initiatives.

Keywords: United Nations; Belarus; UN institutional building; first-tier issues; second-tier issues; unifying initiatives.

Acknowledgements. I would like to extend my particular appreciation to Andrei Dapkiunas, deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, for his overall review of the essay and his valuable general suggestions on the workings of the United Nations system, which he formed from his work as the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the UN in New York for many years.

My thanks also go to Irina Velichko, director for multilateral diplomacy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, who before the current post has served as Belarus' deputy Permanent Representative in New York, for her specific suggestions related to the issues of trafficking in persons and the family.

Likewise, I am grateful to Yury Ambrazevich, Permanent Representative of Belarus to the UN Office in Geneva, for his guidance with regard to addressing the topic of middle-income countries based on his extensive research of it, which has been published in the journal "Geneva Policy Briefs" in July 2019.

Finally, I would also like to thank Vadim Pisarevich, deputy Permanent Representative of Belarus to the UN Office in Geneva, for his suggestion with regard to reflecting the similarities between the UN Security Council and the 19th century's Concert of Europe, as well as for his assistance in the identification of some reference sources and help with note compilation.

Образец цитирования:

Макей ВВ. Беларусь в Организации Объединенных Наций: оценка политических достижений. Журнал Белорусского государственного университета. Международные отношения. 2020;1:3–11 (на англ.).

For citation:

Makei VV. Belarus at the United Nations: assessing its political track record. *Journal of the Belarusian State University. International Relations*. 2020;1:3–11.

Автор:

Владимир Владимирович Макей – министр иностранных дел Республики Беларусь.

Author:

Vladimir V. Makei, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.
mail@mfa@gov.by

БЕЛАРУСЬ В ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ: ОЦЕНКА ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ ДОСТИЖЕНИЙ

В. В. МАКЕЙ¹⁾

¹⁾Министерство иностранных дел Республики Беларусь, ул. Ленина, 19, 220030, г. Минск, Беларусь

В связи с празднованием 75-летия основания Организация Объединенных Наций привлекает все больше внимания, что, в свою очередь, порождает многочисленные ожидания от организации. Однако система ООН способна сделать ровно столько, сколько позволяет ее институциональное строительство. В частности, ее деятельность по комплексу вопросов первого уровня – вопросам мира и безопасности – ограничена в большей степени, нежели деятельность по вопросам второго уровня, не относящимся к безопасности. С 1945 г. Республика Беларусь с переменным успехом сотрудничает с Организацией Объединенных Наций. Наиболее заметна деятельность Беларуси в ООН, начиная с 2005 г., благодаря выдвижению ряда объединяющих инициатив.

Ключевые слова: Организация Объединенных Наций; Республика Беларусь; институциональное строительство ООН; вопросы первого уровня; вопросы второго уровня; объединяющие инициативы.

Благодарность. Автор статьи хотел бы выразить особую признательность заместителю министра иностранных дел Республики Беларусь Андрею Дапкюнасу за ценные общие рекомендации по работе в системе Организации Объединенных Наций, которые были сформированы на основе его многолетнего опыта работы в должности Постоянного представителя Республики Беларусь при ООН в Нью-Йорке.

Также хотелось бы поблагодарить начальника главного управления многосторонней дипломатии Министерства иностранных дел Республики Беларусь Ирину Величко, которая ранее занимала должность заместителя Постоянного представителя Республики Беларусь при ООН в Нью-Йорке, за ее предложения по вопросам торговли людьми.

Кроме того, автор статьи выражает признательность Постоянному представителю Республики Беларусь при отделении ООН в Женеве Юрию Амбразевичу за экспертные рекомендации по проблемам стран со средним уровнем дохода, которые являются результатом его собственного комплексного исследования, опубликованного в журнале “Женевский политический бюллетень” в июле 2019 г.

Хотелось бы поблагодарить заместителя Постоянного представителя Беларуси при отделении ООН в Женеве Вадима Писаревица за его предложение отразить сходство между Советом Безопасности ООН и Системой Европейского концерта XIX в., а также за помощь в подборе некоторых источников и материала для исследования.

Introduction

Anniversaries of international organizations usually attract great global media and public attention. Furthermore, they present a unique opportunity to take stock of international organizations' track records and to ponder over their future relevance. Something along these lines we have witnessed as recently as June 2019, when the International Labour Organization (ILO) staged its centenary celebration, with numerous heads of state and government coming to Geneva to pay tribute to the ILO's indispensable and commendable work.

As for the year of 2020, it is undoubtedly the United Nations that is poised to capture the limelight as the organization is celebrating its 75th anniversary. Three quarters of a century is rather a long period for an international organization. The mere fact that the United Nations still exists testifies to the continued relevance of the organization. When asked whether the world needs the UN, the overwhelming number of respondents worldwide would certainly answer in the affirmative.

However, the situation with the UN is not as simple as it may appear to an ordinary observer. Indeed, throughout its history the United Nations has gone through many successes, but it has experienced as well many failures. Some praise it for its permanent quest

for peace, justice and prosperity. Others accuse it of irrelevance, internal corruption and bloated bureaucracy.

Political scientists associated with the realist international theory would claim that the United Nations is nothing more than the reflection of great power politics and can go as far as great powers allow it to go. Their intellectual opponents from the liberal international theory would counter that the United Nations and its multiple agencies have made us all interdependent and interwoven to such an extent as to rule out the possibility of a major great power war. Perhaps, both camps are right.

What the anniversaries present, however, is not just an opportunity to celebrate the achievements and deliver earth-shattering statements. Even more so, it is an opportunity to take a *critical* look at organizations, to glean something from their past experience that would allow us to apply it with success in the future to the advantage of all.

It is exactly with this logic in mind that this essay has been written. Therefore, the essay is neither an attempt at writing a history of the United Nations, nor is it an effort at narrating Belarus' activities in the United Nations. Numerous books and articles on both abound.

So, what it is instead is an undertaking at realizing a number of objectives. First, the essay will take a close look at the UN institutional building in order to reveal what is possible and what is not possible in the United Nations. Second, the essay will analyze how Belarus was able to tap into those opportunities at the United Nations presented by the organization's institutional structure. Finally, the essay will try to predict how the UN is likely to evolve in the years to come and what

the past experience of Belarus at the United Nations tells us about its future role in the organization.

Basically, it will be an assessment of Belarus' *political* track record at the United Nations, that is, an appraisal of its political initiatives, because it is these kind of initiatives that contributed to the common good of all member states, and which also served in the bargain to raise the geopolitical profile of our own country.

The UN institutional building

One can often hear accusations that are lavishly thrown at the United Nations, for example: "Who was responsible for genocide in Rwanda in 1994?", "Surely, it was the United Nations because it failed to step in", "Who was responsible for the US invasion in Iraq in 2003?" "It was the United Nations, and specifically, its Security Council, as the latter failed to prevent it".

Such kinds of accusations actually have very little to do with reality. Their purpose is, rather, is either to serve someone's political ends at the expense of the universal organization or to create media hype and sensation. Thus, the UN often appears as the "culprit". But the organization finds itself in this situation absolutely unfairly. There are actually limits to what the United Nations can do. It is important to see and understand those limits before laying the blame for all troubles in the world on the United Nations.

True, the United Nations did not emerge from scratch. Its founders had before their eyes the experience of the League of Nations (League), an international organization that had been established in the wake of the World War I. Naturally, much has been "copied" from what had worked in the League and has been "pasted" onto the newly created United Nations Organization.

For example, the League had an Assembly, which included all members, and a Council, a body with limited membership. Similar structures emerged in the UN, they are the General Assembly and the Security Council. The League had a secretariat, a position of a Secretary General and a mandates system over colonial territories. Similar institutional features were created in the United Nations (the Secretary General, the Secretariat and the Trusteeship Council).

Notwithstanding these similarities, the United Nations was given by its founders two crucial new functions that the League did not have. First, the founders created the Economic and Social Council as one of the main organs of the United Nations. It was clearly done with the Global Depression of the 1930s in mind. The 1930s global economic travails were thought to have contributed immensely to the World War II, whereas the League did not have a mandate to tackle them. So, the shortcoming was rectified in the context of the United Nations.

Second, and most importantly, the League was paralyzed in its action by the requirement of consen-

sus. Indeed, decisions in both the Leagues' Assembly and its Council were made only by consensus. This institutional arrangement was actually the League's major flaw, because it forestalled any collective action against aggressive foreign policies that Axis powers began demonstrating in the 1930s.

Thus, the founders came up with the idea of a Council with two categories of membership (permanent and non-permanent), which, they thought, would be a significant improvement over the Leagues' Council. Indeed, while the League's Council could have been paralyzed by any of its members, the UN Security Council, according to its designers, would be incapacitated only by any of its five permanent members – USSR, USA, France, Britain and China (the Big Five), which were given by the UN Charter the right of veto, but not by non-permanent members.

But, the idea of an "exclusive club" was not a novelty either because there was also a historic precedent for it. Following the Napoleonic Wars great powers of the day established at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 the Concert of Europe. This structure aimed, above all, at forestalling revolutions and fighting liberalism in Europe.

As Henry Kissinger noted in his "Diplomacy" (1994), "the Concert of Europe implied that nations that were competitive on one level would settle matters affecting overall stability by consensus" [1, p. 83]. Indeed, the Concert operated on the basis of consensus among the five key European powers which are Austria, Britain, France, Prussia and Russia. Over the following four decades these powers almost always thought in unison that allowed for their collective action when it was needed. But, as their foreign policy priorities changed with time, they began thinking differently, common action became impossible and the Concert fell apart.

Why the idea of a Concert-like "exclusive" club was replicated in the UN context? Perhaps, because at the end of World War II nothing indicated unequivocally that its victorious powers would not be able to cooperate for many years to come as effectively as their predecessors did in the Concert of Europe. As Henry Kissinger pointed out in his "Diplomacy": "Roosevelt's [Frank Delano Roosevelt] concept of the Four Policemen [USSR, USA, Britain and China] was in fact structurally similar to Metternich's Holy Alliance. Each

system represented an attempt to preserve the peace through a coalition of victors upholding shared values” [1, p. 397].

Therefore, in terms of institutional arrangements the United Nations is not, and has never actually been conceived, as an ideal universal structure destined to resolve all problems in the world. It is certainly far from being a kind of a world government that many may incorrectly take it for and thus expect impossible from it. The organization was merely designed as an improved variant of the League with some useful borrowings from the even earlier collective governance experiences such as the 19th century’s Concert of Europe.

Consequently, the realist theory proponents are absolutely right by saying that the United Nations can go only as far as its permanent members can allow it to go. Consider, for example, two very similar cases related to the invasion of Iraq. In the first case dated from 1991 the five permanent members of the UN Security Council gave their “green light” for collective action against Iraq. Thus, the war was declared legitimate, and the UN was praised worldwide.

By contrast, in 2003, the Security Council’s Big Five were divided. Consequently, the US and its allies went to war without international “blessing”. As a result, the 2003 war was declared by the world’s majority to be illegitimate, and the UN was vilified.

The key conclusion from these musings is that the United Nations can effectively deliver on critical issues of international peace and security only if the Big Five think identically. More than two hundred vetoes cast by the permanent members in the Security Council since 1945 indicate that they have differed in opinion far too often¹.

What can also be inferred from this analysis is that as the Organization’s institutional arrangement has empowered the Big Five on international peace and security matters, so has it significantly limited the scope for other UN member states to pursue and realize their own ideas and initiatives in these crucial domains.

It means that other member states can realize their peace and security-related initiatives, which for the sake of convenience may be dubbed first-tier issues, only if those conform to the permanent five’s individual vision and interests. A clear example of this is provided by the never-ending process of the UN Security Council reform. All attempts at enlarging this main organ over the past three decades have run into nowhere, largely because of the Big Five’s attitudes.

But, the United Nations is not only about peace and security. Its founders demonstrated great foresight by establishing the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Conceived initially as a body to deal with the 1930s depression-like challenges, the ECOSOC actually grew into something far larger. It became an umbrella or an overarching framework, if you will, under which a whole array of functional commissions, stand-alone agencies, programmes and the like on economic, social, environmental and other adjacent issues was subsequently created.

As a result, the United Nations, when it comes to these non-security matters, which for the sake of convenience can be called second-tier issues, presents something that the world has never experienced before. Indeed, neither the League nor the Concert of Europe were ever preoccupied with such concerns. But these kind of issues are extremely important insofar as they closely interconnect all of us, make us interdependent, and as the liberal theorists claim, make a major great power war unimaginable.

What is more, it is here, in this second-tier realm, in which the Big Five see less, if often any, strategic concerns, where other UN member states can take the lead on some issues, bring their ideas to fruition, and, thus, do something that brings benefit to everyone.

So, where does Belarus, a *founding member of the United Nations*, with its 75 years of experience, stand in the organization in the context of this institutional arrangement?

Belarus at the United Nations

With the view to answering the question posed above it would make sense to introduce three conditional time periods of Belarus’ engagement with the United Nations: 1945–1990, 1990–2005, and 2005 – present.

1945–1990. Belarus started at the United Nations very well indeed. At the first session of the General Assembly, held in 1946, the delegation proposed a resolution entitled “Extradition and punishment of war criminals”. The resolution requested both UN member states and other countries to take most vigorous measures to search for war criminals, arrest and extra-

dite them to the countries, where they had committed crimes.

Belarus went further with the topic of war crimes and tabled a draft resolution at the 23rd session the UN General Assembly in 1968 on “Question of the punishment of war criminals and of persons who have committed crimes against humanity”, which main idea was not to apply the statute of limitations to war crimes and war criminals. The resolution was adopted by consensus.

These two resolutions undoubtedly fell to the first-tier peace and security cluster, but we succeeded be-

¹See: United Nations Security Council veto power [Electronic resource]. URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_veto_power (date of access: 20.04.2020).

cause everyone in the UN General Assembly, including the Big Five, agreed with our proposed action.

A couple of years later, at the 28th session of the General Assembly, held in 1973, Belarus sponsored a resolution on "Use of scientific and technological developments in the interests of peace and social development". The resolution contained a number of relevant appeals to member states and international organizations. It was our first "inroads" into the second-tier cluster on the United Nations agenda. We succeeded and the resolution was adopted by consensus.

The year of 1973 was memorable for Belarus for another reason, namely, because it was elected to the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member. We served on there in the course of the two subsequent years (1974–1975). It was the only time that Belarus has ever served on the Security Council. It goes without saying that in the bitter atmosphere of cold war politics we, while in the Security Council, strictly adhered to the Soviet foreign policy line.

So, this four and a half decade-long period was generally marked for Belarus by a few initiatives, although generally our freedom of action was constrained by the fact that Belarus was not an independent country.

1990–2005. It makes sense to begin this second period not from 1992, when Belarus began acting in the United Nations as an independent state, but rather from 1990. It is so because in 1990 Belarus proposed at the UN General Assembly a draft resolution on Chernobyl that became and still remains one of the areas for priority action for our foreign policy.

The resolution under a rather lengthy title "International co-operation to address and mitigate the consequences of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant", adopted by the UN General Assembly by consensus, has generally tasked the United Nations to tackle the problem of Chernobyl. Subsequently, the Inter-agency task force on Chernobyl was established and many UN agencies began their long-term involvement in Chernobyl related activities.

In the context of this resolution Belarus has always closely cooperated with the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the other two most affected countries. The latest resolution on Chernobyl, submitted by Belarus as a main sponsor, entitled "Persistent legacy of the Chernobyl disaster" was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2019. Its main focus is on the need to promote sustainable development of the Chernobyl-affected regions. This mandate is fully in line with the United Nations' overall mandate for sustainable development. On the initiative of Belarus 26 April was proclaimed the International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day in the UN since 2017.

The topic of Chernobyl is one falling into the second non-security cluster. Belarus, as the most affected of all, has certainly been the most vigorous in raising this issue at the United Nations. Our political lead here is well established and respected by both UN

membership and relevant international organizations. Suffice it to say that in recent years it has invariably been Belarus that sponsored various side-events on the International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day whether in Geneva, New York, Vienna or elsewhere. Other countries and partners fully acknowledge our leadership and always join us.

Apart from the issue of Chernobyl, the 1990–2005 period was notable for some of our initiatives in the realm of security issues.

Belarus became the first among successor states of the former Soviet Union to renounce nuclear weapons, and complete the withdrawal of all nuclear weapons from its territory by the end of 1996.

Belarus' aspiration to strengthen security and stability in the European region transformed into initiative to establish a nuclear-weapon free zone in Central and Eastern Europe put forward in the beginning of 1990s. Consequently, a relevant resolution was tabled by the delegation of Belarus at the 53rd session of the UN General Assembly in December 1998. The resolution was adopted by a vote.

Belarus' consistent policy in the field of international security, disarmament and non-proliferation was reflected in the resolution titled "Prohibition of the development and manufacture of new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons", which is being tabled by our country in the UN General Assembly on a regular basis since 1990. This resolution is of warning nature, as preventive measures are the best way of dealing with potential threats to international peace and security.

To sum up, during this 15-year long period Belarus generally has been more visible in the United Nations than during the preceding four decades. We have laid the foundation for the UN system to address Chernobyl on a permanent basis. We have made significant "inroads" into the peace and security domain of the United Nations. But the fact that some of our initiatives were put to a vote indicated that the interests of great powers were at stake.

Furthermore, Belarus has actively participated in various UN conferences and events on economic and social matters held in abundance throughout this period, for example, the 1994 International conference on population and development, the 1995 Social Summit, the 1996 Habitat conference, the 2000 UN Summit, the 2001 International conference on financing for development. However, during this period we have not come up with our own initiatives in this second-tier realm that would be demanded by the international community and that would make us really visible and indispensable in the United Nations.

That, perhaps, explains the fact that during this time frame Belarus has twice lost election to the United Nations Security Council in 1993 and in 2001.

2005 – present. The year of 2005 truly marked a watershed in Belarus' approaches to the United Na-

tions. At that year's central event (the United Nations Summit) President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko announced two important initiatives.

First, the President called upon the international community to recognize the diversity of ways towards progressive development. Was it really necessary to state such an obvious thing? Yes, it was, because this postulate was not so obvious in the harsh geopolitical atmosphere of the new millennium's early years, when some Western countries tried to impose their will on the rest of the world by means of war and disregard for international law.

Many back then thought that the *unipolar moment* with all its negative implications was for long with us to stay². But Belarus was not among those pessimists. We have unambiguously stated that it is diversity, not uniformity, that drives human development and progress. As a matter of fact, it was a very bold step to state such a thing loud and clear from the UN General Assembly's rostrum.

With the benefit of hindsight, however, it can safely be said that the vision of global diversity voiced by the President of the Republic of Belarus has been fully vindicated. Indeed, by the end of that decade the *unipolar moment* faded away and with it disappeared any serious attempt by Western countries to impose so-called democratic and liberal forms of domestic governance on others. Ever since 2005, Belarus did its best at the United Nations to draw attention to the "diversity" initiative and reflect it in the organization's various documents.

Moreover, the "diversity" initiative has been properly developed in conceptual terms and presented to the global public in a comprehensive piece written by me under the title "The emerging global system: embracing diversity-politic and partnerships" [2].

Its central tenet is that while global politics in the past was characterized by "concentrated" systems in terms of actors and types of challenges, the current system is a "diffused" one. This new system can effectively be governed with the logic of diversity and the tool of inclusive partnerships [2, p. 66–74]. More on partnerships will be said below in this essay.

Second, at the 2005 UN Summit President Alexander Lukashenko urged the international community to take vigorous action against the crime of trafficking in persons. No one envisaged at that time that over the coming years combating human trafficking will have become Belarus' hallmark initiative.

Foreign partners often ask Belarusian diplomats what drives us to be so proactive in this field. First and

foremost, it was our domestic action. Namely, Belarus has erected and implemented very robust anti-trafficking legislation in 2003–2005, which allowed us to reduce the crime to such an extent that it actually ceased to bother the public.

That success, in turn, enabled us to share national experience at higher levels. What is more, our active engagement in global anti-trafficking discourse since 2005 has served to raise our knowledge of the problem, which allowed Belarus to consistently propose new solutions³.

To name just some of them. Following the President's call, the delegation of Belarus has proposed at the 60th session of the UN General Assembly in 2005 to forge a "Global partnership against human trafficking", which implies close co-operation among countries, international organizations, civil society and private sector. This notion has since then invariably been reflected in all anti-trafficking resolutions, declarations, reports, etc.

Next year, in 2006, Belarus tabled at the General Assembly for the first time a draft resolution on "Improving the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons". The resolution gave birth to the Inter-agency coordination groups against trafficking in persons (ICAT), which today brings together 23 international agencies. ICAT is the crucial international body that closely coordinates activities of its members, carries out research and offers advice to countries and other stakeholders.

Belarus sponsors the above resolution on a biennial basis. The latest resolution was adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly in December 2019. It is the key omnibus UN anti-trafficking resolution that provides relevant mandates to the United Nations and many of its agencies and contains important action-oriented recommendations to member states.

Since 2005 Belarus began advocating the need to develop a global plan of action on human trafficking. In our view, a global plan was needed in order to provide a comprehensive overarching political framework to global anti-trafficking efforts, which would also spell out roles for various stakeholders. The case for a global plan was well and succinctly laid out by Sergei Martynov, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, in his article entitled "Human trafficking: beyond the protocol" [3].

It took Belarus five years of relentless and painstaking work to bring the idea of a global plan to fruition. As a result, the UN General Assembly adopted the Global Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons on

²The term "unipolar moment" was invented by American political scientist Charles Krauthammer. See: Krauthammer C. The unipolar moment [Electronic resource] // Foreign Affairs. 1990. Vol. 70. No. 1. URL: <http://users.metu.edu.tr/utuba/Krauthammer.pdf> (date of access: 20.04.2020).

³For more information on how Belarus' knowledge on human trafficking evolved see: Makey V. Human trafficking in the post-cold war period: towards a comprehensive approach [Electronic resource] // Journ. of Internatl. Affairs. URL: <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/online-articles/human-trafficking-post-cold-war-period-towards-comprehensive-approach> (date of access: 20.04.2020); Sychov A. Human trafficking: a call for global action [Electronic resource] // Globality Studies Journ. 2009. Issue 14. URL: <https://gsj.stonybrook.edu/article/human-trafficking-a-call-for-global-action/> (date of access: 20.04.2020).

30 July 2010. By the way, in a couple of years that day, the 30 July, was declared by the UN General Assembly to be the International Day against Trafficking in Persons.

Belarus succeeded with the Global Plan, because it was able to rally around it a group of committed countries that vigorously pushed the initiative to its completion. This group was institutionalized under the name of the group of friends united against human trafficking (Group). Today, it has in its ranks 22 UN member states from different parts of the world. It operates in New York, Vienna, Geneva and Paris. Its members cooperate closely in advancing anti-trafficking resolutions and stage various relevant side-events, including in partnership with ICAT.

Since its establishment in 2010, the Group has invariably been chaired by Belarus. Since then the Group has organized five meetings at the ministerial level, with the latest being held in September 2019. The meetings end up with declarations, which set forth some guidance for the Group's "field" activities. The Group's primary focus has always been the Global Plan of Action. In particular, members of the Group work together in advancing regular Belarus-sponsored resolutions on the Global Plan at the UN Commission on crime prevention and criminal justice (UN Crime Commission) and at the ECOSOC.

In recent years, Belarus has been in the lead in advancing a number of specific aspects of the human trafficking cluster, which experts often refer to as new dimensions of human trafficking. In particular, in 2014 and 2016 Belarus sponsored at the UN Crime Commission draft resolutions on organ trafficking⁴, in 2018 – on trafficking in persons and technology, the plan for 2020 is to table an ECOSOC draft resolution on trafficking in supply chains.

As was mentioned earlier, in the context of its "diversity" initiative Belarus began speaking loudly about global partnerships. Indeed, in today's "diffused" world we can achieve success against any transnational challenge only when all positive stakeholders (states, international organizations, civil society, private sector, academia) work together.

Partnerships are especially relevant and possible in the realm of second-tier non-security issues. A clear example of this can be seen from a Belarus-sponsored resolution titled "Strengthening the engagement of all members of society in crime prevention", which we proposed at the UN Crime Commission in May 2019. The resolution was adopted by consensus and was sponsored by nearly 40 countries, including Austria, Canada, Japan, France, Italy, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, the USA. This fact clearly indicates one thing, namely, that UN member states support our vision of partnerships.

There are two more second-tier matters, which Belarus holds very dear. These are the topic of middle-income countries (MICs) and the issue of the family.

MICs represent a diverse group of around 100 countries as classified by the World Bank's income per capita criteria. The active discourse on MICs, including in the United Nations, emerged in the middle of the past decade due to certain global political and economic developments. What distinguishes middle-income countries from other groups is the fact that they play a dual role. Indeed, on the one hand, they still need international assistance for their own development. On the other, they increasingly become donors of international assistance.

What is of a particular importance for middle-income countries is to institutionalize their cooperation with the United Nations system through the development of a strategic document because the MICs is the only major group in the United Nations that lacks such a document, and hence, it lacks systemic cooperation with the UN system.

Belarus has been very actively involved in this topic ever since it emerged. We are a middle-income country and we share the MICs "dual role" mentality. Belarus has staged a number of conferences and side-events of MICs, at which we actively advanced the issue of a strategic document. Moreover, along with Costa-Rica Belarus created and co-chaired in the UN the Like-minded group of countries supporters of middle-income countries that brings together 13 UN member states. To make sure that our efforts are practice-oriented and bring tangible benefits to MICs, we successfully initiated development of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) strategic framework for partnering with middle-income countries, which was adopted by the UNIDO General Conference in November 2019.

One can find a comprehensive and detailed analysis of this issue in an article titled "Middle-income countries: a long journey to UN institutionalization", written by Yury Ambrazevich, Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations Office in Geneva [4].

As for the family, this issue has been in the forefront of global discussions for the past two decades. Yet, the debate is becoming increasingly polarizing and divisive as Western countries seek to embed in UN documents their radical views on the diversity of family forms. This, however, cannot be accepted by a very large number of other states, including Belarus, which historically adhere to the values of the traditional family.

Belarus stepped in the debate in 2013. Moreover, in partnership with Egypt and Qatar we established the Group of friends of the family. Today this group comprises 25 UN member states. It naturally works to

⁴More on the topic see: *Makei V. Trafficking in human organs // Forced Migration Review. 2015. Issue 49. P. 91–92.*

advocate the values of the traditional family, often in cooperation with like-minded partners from international organizations and civil society.

Understanding that it is impossible to reconcile the two camps in their views on the family any time soon, Belarus tries to make the debate less polarizing and divisive. Driven by this logic, I wrote a major article entitled “Identity politics and culture wars: a new determinism?” [5].

The article clearly demonstrates why and how so-called “libertarian” family values emerged in the West as a result of the 1960s culture wars, and why similar attitudes did not and could not emerge in other parts of the world [5]. The article’s key message is this: if we cannot come to a shared view on the family, let us understand why we have different views, let us respect each others’ views, and let us refrain from imposing on each other something that the other group does not accept.

By the way, a very similar “unifying” message came from me even earlier, that time in the area of human rights, through a comprehensive essay entitled “Human rights: what and who made them divide the world” [6].

Indeed, as the essay shows, our “different approaches to human rights stem from the countries’ specific historical experience of development, which in some cases forged a centralized and collective nature of societies, whereas in others they were conducive to decentralization and individualism. Understanding the historical reasons behind other countries’ different stance on human rights may contribute to non-confrontational international relations” [6]. In the current poisonous atmosphere of the UN Human Rights Council, it is a recipe that all would be well advised to heed.

As the above two publications indicate, Belarus truly attaches great importance to doing something “unifying”. We never hesitate to propose an action that may close the gap between UN member states on any divisive and polarizing topic. As a matter of fact, the “unifying agenda” has become a distinguishing feature of all of our initiatives at the United Nations in the period since 2005, whether it is diversity, trafficking in persons, crime prevention, middle-income countries, family, narcotic drugs, technology and some others. In all of these instances we propose action that brings benefit to all and which leaves no one behind.

Looking beyond 2020

How the 75th anniversary will affect the United Nations? That is the question that is being frequently asked these days. Many pundits would say that we should expect nothing significant occurring at the organization as nothing important has happened to the UN in the wake of its previous anniversaries and summits.

So, according to this logic, the United Nations will inevitably revert to its “business-as-usual” once the world’s leaders deliver their statements at the summit and leave for home. There is certainly a grain of truth in this logic, which is buttressed by a number of serious arguments.

First, as it has been shown in one section above here, the United Nations is institutionally constrained and can deliver, especially on peace and security, only as much as its leading powers allow it. Can we expect any institutional overhaul in connection with the current anniversary like, for instance, an enlargement of the UN Security Council, which would mend the shortcomings? Unfortunately, we cannot, because these are not currently on the agenda.

Second, there is certainly some degree of disappointment with the United Nations and disbelief in what it can do. It is best demonstrated in the proliferation over the past two decades of various close clubs that bring together a limited number of participants,

who believe that it is easier to decide on a specific issue within a small circle rather than at the United Nations. There are many such: G7, G20, the Middle East Quartet, BRICS and so on.

Third, and most importantly, history teaches us that truly drastic international changes are possible only as a result of global catastrophes, but not during times of peace, because it is extremely hard to mobilize and motivate people when they are not much troubled⁵. Indeed, both the League and the United Nations are testimonies to such horrible experiences. Such kind of understanding also rules out the possibility that the United Nations will be replaced by a third generation of international organization any time soon⁶.

Yet, it will be extremely pity if the United Nations remains anchored by the above constraints, trends and developments, which are beyond its current ability to master. It is especially pity as we realize that these factors significantly hamstringing the organization in its ability to deliver on its key mandate – supporting member states in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, it is particularly pity, because ordinary people around the globe increasingly realize that only by acting together can we overcome global challenges, like the novel coronavirus that is ravaging the world as this essay is being written.

⁵The argument has been well presented by James Traub in his book “The best intentions” (2006). The book is devoted to Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General.

⁶The notion of a third generation of international organizations implies creation of a set of new organizations. The League and some other organizations founded along with it after World War I are considered the first generation of international organizations, while the UN system and other organization set up after World War II are regarded as the second generation of international organizations.

But what can be done?

Dag Hammarskjöld, the highly esteemed second Secretary-General of the United Nations, once said: "Never measure the height of a mountain until you have reached the top. Then you will see how low it was" [7, p. 265]. Member states, which are not indifferent to the fate of the United Nations, should be well advised to be guided by that valuable saying. In practice it means always aspire for impossible.

It is exactly with that attitude with which Belarus is going to continue its engagement with the United Nations beyond the anniversary year. We will certainly continue to be as active as before, if not more so, in

advancing our well known unifying second-tier initiatives. What is more, we will aspire for what at present seems indeed impossible. In particular, we attach paramount importance to the idea of launching a comprehensive security dialogue that was proposed by the President of the Republic of Belarus at the opening of the 26th session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in July 2017.

After all, irrespective of how far Belarus can go with its initiative, we are absolutely convinced that we are right in proposing a global security dialogue at a time when one is urgently required. And we hope that history will ultimately prove that we were right.

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Received by editorial board 22.04.2020.