INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS IN PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Abstract. Promotion of human rights, progress in the sustainable development and overcoming of different forms of poverty on the national, regional and global level is one of the most important directions of the multilateral diplomacy of the Republic of Belarus since its independence in 1991. Based on an international experience of the Belarusian SSR as one of the United Nations founders in its main bodies, primarily the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as well as its special institutions, the Belarusian diplomacy has already established mutually beneficial and effective cooperation with other countries in many important issues. Among them, there are such key and acute topics as a fighting against poverty and unequal access to social benefits and achievements, as well as overcoming regional and structural imbalances for different social groups and communities.

This comprehensive dialogue with our leading international partners including a special role of our partnership with China continued and developed successfully in the early 21st century. It allowed the Republic of Belarus to contribute to the modern understanding of human rights in the context of global sustainable development. Achieving its Goals (SDGs) until 2030, agreed by all UN members is one of the most important aspects and challenges for the policy of the Republic of Belarus and for its primary vision of the promotion of human rights issues in the global world.

Our understanding of them is based on their universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and complementary nature. To ensure each of their most important categories: civil, political, economic, social, cultural it should be adhere to the same positions and attitudes with equal attention. International cooperation in this sphere is to be aimed at strengthening mutual trust and developing effective multilateral mechanisms to solve the most important global problems.

The Republic of Belarus opposes consistently and resolutely any attempts to politicize them and calls for a comprehensive approach to the protection of all categories of human rights and liberties in the framework of international cooperation without prioritizing or minimizing them.

Introduction. The Republic of Belarus as a modern democratic social and legal state considers humans, their rights, freedoms and guarantees for their realization as the highest value and purpose for the development
of society, the functioning of the state and cooperation with other countries and international organizations. Promotion of all categories of human rights and liberties: civil, political, economic, social, cultural, including rights to development has determined and continues to define the profile and main directions of our interaction with different states and institutes in overcoming relevant global challenges and risks.

The key of them is poverty and its consequences now, and namely social and regional inequality, lack of equal and fair access to modern achievements of world economy, science and technology, culture. It generates conflicts between states, growing mutual distrust, as well as regional and global instability.

International cooperation in the human rights promotion, implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the national and global levels, full and consistent human rights promotion in cooperation with the UN organizations and agencies should be the most important aspects of this comprehensive issue.

It is especially important also to share experience and consider the ways and means realized by our leading international partners, and China among them, to improve effectiveness of international cooperation and human rights promotion for the purpose of poverty alleviation and overcoming its dangerous consequences.

**Literature review.** The most important results of the long-term cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and other countries as well as the UN organizations and agencies, and regional institutions to promote the SDGs and all categories of human rights and liberties in different spheres and problem fields were defined and characterized by prominent Belarusian scholars. It could be named first the research publications of Aleksandr M. Baichorov, Elena A. Dostanko, Andrey V. Selivanov, Victor G. Shadurski [1–4]. Yulianna I. Malevich considered a wide range of relevant human rights issues in the modern world and its key regions including Eastern and Southeastern Asia in a series of papers dedicated to common analysis and selective studies of the most topical directions and aspects for human rights promotion [5–9].

An integral and detailed assessment of the historical and cultural reasons for formation of different approaches to the human rights and civil liberties definition in the modern world was presented in the article «Human Rights: What and Who Made Them Divide the World?» by Minister
of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Vladimir Makei. It was published in the magazine «Russia in Global Affairs» in June 2013. The author formulated and substantiated a comprehensive recommendation to avoid this division during the building of the most effective international cooperation to meet the current and new global risks and challenges [10].

At the same time, an advanced character of interaction at all levels, and namely global, regional, national and local needed to overcome successfully these issues required not only a common evaluation of results reached by Belarus in this sphere in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. It causes also a complex comparison of approaches used by different states to realize these goals and targets, as well as actualizes a further research and implementation of effective ways and tools of international cooperation that has determined a topic of this article.

**Research methods.** The multi-aspect and complicated nature of such study led to a necessity of using of several research methods combination, which includes comparative-historical and structural-functional analyses. Both of them allowed exploring and considering in detail the most important directions and aspects of international cooperation of the Republic of Belarus for the SDGs and human rights promotions as well as key features of our interaction with other countries and UN main bodies and agencies. A historical comparison provided an opportunity to define and characterize different periods during the international activity of Belarus to overcome poverty, social and regional inequality, and alleviate their most dangerous and damaged consequences. A structural-functional analysis was very useful for comprehensive evaluation of a role of interaction with different UN bodies, organizations and agencies in this key sphere of multilateral cooperation.

**Results of the research.**

1. **The main initiatives of Belarus in the sphere of international cooperation for promotion of human rights.**

Since the first years of the formation of the current post-bipolar international order the Republic of Belarus has supported a creation of favorable conditions for the sustainable development for all countries and regions of the world, which could be served as the most reliable guarantee for ensuring global security and stability.

In 1997, on the initiative of the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko hosted the International Conference on the Sustainable
Development of Countries in Transition in Minsk. This group of states included the Republic of Belarus and a significant part of its neighbors within the region strived to ensure equal conditions for economic and social development based on a multipolar vision of further world architecture.

The organizers of this conference were the UN Secretariat, the UN Development Program (UNDP), the UN Environment Program (UNEP). It showed a significant increase of interest to fighting against global poverty and overcoming social inequality. As a result of the conference a comprehensive final document was approved with a call to provide opportunities for sustainable development for all states and regions of the world¹.

To effectively ensure economic and social human rights at the beginning of the 21st century the Republic of Belarus made every effort to strengthen such key UN institution as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established to coordinate effectively the activities of all UN organizations and agencies in the economic, social and environmental areas.

A notable attention was paid by the Belarusian delegation to the expansion of the humanitarian dimensions on the ECOSOC agenda, which was aimed not only at intensifying this aspect of multilateral cooperation, but also at enhancing the political potential of the ECOSOC as the most important forum for discussions on the sustainable development issue.

Our country was elected to the ECOSOC nine times since 1947 regarding also the Soviet period, and most recently in June 2017 for 2018–2020².

In 2000, the resolution about measures against racism, political platforms and activities based on doctrines of superiority grounded on racial discrimination or ethnic exclusivity and xenophobia, including neo-Nazism in particular was sponsored by the Republic of Belarus at the 55th session of the UN General Assembly and approved by their members. The resolution urged all states to take urgent measures to eliminate such mani-

festations both incompatible with democracy and impeding the realization of human rights and fundamental liberties.\(^3\)

In the beginning of the 21st century, the most important initiative of Belarus was a call of President Alexander Lukashenko at the 2005 UN Summit to exert all mutual efforts to combat human trafficking, which became a serious challenge for the world community. The Republic of Belarus was the first country in the post-soviet region to address this problem, developed the necessary national legislation, taking into account international best practices in combating human trafficking and illegal migration. In 2005, at the 60th session of the General Assembly, the Belarusian delegation proposed the creation of «Global Partnership against Slavery and Trafficking in Human Beings in the 21st Century» under the auspices of the United Nations to unite the efforts of states, international organizations, civil society and the private sector in combating the modern slave trade. On October 19, 2006, the 61st session of the UN General Assembly adopted unanimously the draft resolution on improving the coordination in this sphere introduced by Belarus. On March 5, 2007, an international conference «Trafficking in Women and Girls: Meeting the Challenge Together» was organized and held at the UN Headquarters in New York on the initiative of Belarus with participation of more than 90 states and 20 international organizations. In July 2010, the UN adopted the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appreciated highly this document supposed to provide an effective international mechanism to address this acute problem, including prevention of crimes related to human trafficking and prosecution of criminals. Belarus supported also a work of the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons created in accordance with the Global Plan. Our country contributed to this Fund one of the first. At the UN Headquarters in New York and UN Offices in Vienna and Geneva, the Group of Friends United against Human Trafficking was established by the proposal of Belarus. It includes 22 states from all regions and continents.\(^4\)

Another significant initiative during the 2005 UN Summit was a call of President Alexander Lukashenko to recognize a diversity of the ways of

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progressive development as a value of human civilization. This proposal was aimed at promoting a more just and equitable world order, strengthening international law and mutually beneficial multilateralism in international relations⁵.

In 2006, the Belarusian delegation at the 61st session of the UN General Assembly initiated a resolution on encouraging an equal and mutually respectful dialogue about human rights condemned motivated politically, unilateral and biased resolutions on human rights situation that could undermine the principles of objectivity and non-selectivity and not encouraging their promotion⁶.

The efforts undertaken by the Republic of Belarus to promote a comprehensive understanding of human rights, fighting against trafficking in human beings and various forms of discrimination were highly appreciated by High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Raad Al Hussein at the meeting with President Alexander Lukashenko on September 27, 2015⁷.

II. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the context of human rights promotion in the Republic of Belarus.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the world community faced a growing challenge of overcoming the inequalities existed between the most developed and rich countries which sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein defined as a core of the modern world and the rest of the world which served as their periphery or semi-periphery. Poverty and permanent social and regional inequality enshrined such international order and created a wide range of economic and humanitarian problems. Their answer should be the mutual efforts to implement the SDGs defined for gradual weakening and elimination of the negative global tendencies.

President Alexander Lukashenko at the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Summit on September 27, 2015 stressed, that «Over the years of sovereign existence Belarus has fulfilled with honor the millennium de vel-

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opment goals related to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving 100% adult literacy, promoting gender equality, social and political stability, and preventing ethnic and religious discrimination. We have no maternal mortality. The child mortality is the lowest in the world». The effectiveness in solving of such problems was determined much more today by contribution of countries to global sustainable development than by their theoretical debates on human rights or democracy. The President called also on all states to demonstrate «mutual understanding and responsibility, the recognition of our diversity, the renewal of trust. Only these steps could unite the world community, safeguard peace and security, find effective responses to global challenges and threats».

To achieve these results the Republic of Belarus is implementing consistently and purposefully the SDGs based on the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in September 2015 and included 17 SDGs and 169 their targets. The National Coordinator for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Belarus is Deputy Chairman of the Council of the Republic (The Upper Chamber) of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus Marianna Shchotkina. She headed the National Council for Sustainable Development with the participation of representatives of key government bodies and organizations, as well as with the possible involving business communities, public associations and international organizations.

During the visit to Belarus on February 21–22, 2018, to take part in the Regional Forum of National Coordinators on Sustainable Development Goals from Europe and Central Asia, UN First Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed noted that it is extremely important for Belarus to support the principles of multi-polarity and multilateral solutions to international problems. She held meetings with representatives of the Belarusian youth, and namely students, schoolchildren, young businessmen, members of youth parliaments, urging them to implement more actively their personal projects and initiatives with the support of the National Coordinator, who could unite the efforts of state and public institutions.

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An important role in this process is assigned also to the implementation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the Republic of Belarus for 2016–2020, which defines the main areas of cooperation between Belarus and the UN, as well as the activities of UN organizations and agencies in our country.

On June 1, 2015, it was approved by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus. The UNDAF for the Republic of Belarus for 2011–2015 was adopted in October 2010 and realized successfully with the implementation of different international technical assistance projects for $490 million. Its priority five areas were determined as an assistance for: ensuring sustainable social and economic development; strengthening national health care system; ensuring environmental sustainability; developing national migration management; improving the national governance system. These priorities were worked out by the Belarusian government together with representatives of civil society, private business, affected groups of population, national and international partners in cooperation with the UN organizations and agencies to promote and protect human rights in the Republic of Belarus and improve the quality of life of its residents and citizens.

The UNDAF for 2016–2020 provides for activities in four strategic areas in accordance with the priorities represented in the National Strategy for Sustainable Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2030 (NSSD–2030). The cooperation of our country with the UN organizations and agencies in the interests of development for the next five years is determined by the following four priority areas:

1. Inclusive, Responsive and Accountable Governance;
2. Sustainable Economic Development;
3. Environmental Protection and Sustainable Environmental Management Based on the Principles of Green Economy;


Successful implementation of the SDGs both at the national and global levels implies a constant dialogue between countries with different historical and cultural traditions and backgrounds. National coordinator Marianna Shchotkina at the Regional Forum of National Coordinators on February 21, 2018 emphasized that the starting conditions for the SDGs implementation are different for all states. The potentials of countries, levels of development, strategies of economies, standards of living as well as natural conditions, culture, religions differ. Nevertheless, their goals are common to ensure development and prosperity.\textsuperscript{13}

One of the most important and obvious evidence of effective efforts of Belarus to promote the right for development is its place in the annual Human Development Index (HDI) based on a comparison of the standard of living indicators of the UN members and conducted by the UN Development Program since 1990. In the latest report published in September 2018 the Republic of Belarus joined the group of countries with very high HDI, taking 53rd place with 0.808 points and getting ahead of other countries of the post-soviet region, except Russia.\textsuperscript{14}

III. From political discussion to the comprehensive and consistent human rights promotion: the Belarusian experience.

July 5, 2017 President Alexander Lukashenko at the opening ceremony of the 26th session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Minsk stressed that «The elaboration of the first in the history of independent Belarus National Human Rights Action Plan has become the most important element of systemic ensuring of the entire complex of citizens' rights and freedoms»\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{14} Human Development Indices and Indicators. 2018 Statistical Update. 2018. New York, UNDP, p. 22.
Such plan was approved by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus on October 24, 2016 and scheduled for realization in 2016–2019 on implementing the accepted recommendations from the Second Universal Periodic Review of the UN Council and from the Human Rights Treaty Bodies. The Interagency Action Plan is a long-term document aimed at the achievement of seven objectives. They include to meet effectively the international obligations, identify challenges and develop appropriate legislative and institutional responses, apply the best international practices, build capacity of the state institutions, improve the state system of human rights oversight, data collection, analyze and ensure better transparency of the outcomes, expand public and private partnership; support the most vulnerable groups. According to the Interagency Action Plan, its successful implementation will facilitate the realization of the activities prescribed by the government programs intended to safeguard the rights of Belarusian citizens. This process will support the implementation of the current UNDAF and the country programs of the UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA for 2016–2020, as well as will contribute to achieve the goals and objectives in line with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development16.

In his article «Human Rights: What and Who Made Them Divide the World?» in «Russia in Global Affairs» in June 2013 Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Vladimir Makei identified three approaches to the human rights perception. They are Eurasian, European and North American, which were due to many cultural and religious backgrounds and determined clearly the current differences in their evaluations. Considering possible ways to end these long-terms divisions and contradictions, Vladimir Makei noted «the human rights debates, which have been high in the past two decades, have proven futile. They increasingly make it clear that it is impossible to change attitudes that are enrooted in centuries-old specific cultural, religious, and other underpinnings». On this basis, he summarized, that «the issue of human rights must not be as divisive as it is, if only we begin to genuinely appreciate each other’s specific historical courses and treat each other accordingly. This is especially true now that globalization empowers identity politics, and relationship with ‘the other’ has become more fundamental than ever» [10].

For this reason, it is especially important to achieve a universal understanding of the equal importance of all categories of human rights: civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and rights to development, which determines an essence of the global progressive and sustainable partnership.

**Discussion of the results.** The main points of this article and its conclusion were presented as a report during the Session III: «International cooperation and human rights protection in poverty alleviation» of the 2018 Beijing Forum on Human Rights «Poverty Elimination: Seeking Common Development to Build a Community of Shared Future for Human Beings» on September 18, 2018. Their consideration caused an especially circumstantial and open discussion between representatives of national governmental and non-governmental institutes and key UN agencies, as well as experts and scholars exploring different aspects and dimensions of this topic.

One of the most important and practically oriented results of this discussion was a comprehensive understanding of importance to share and use the mutual experience of fighting against the global and regional poverty. The obvious success of the Chinese efforts in solving of this acute problem directed to alleviate disproportions in development of various areas and provinces was recognized widely by the representatives of 50 countries from all regions of the world. The experts from such institutes as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the UN Human Rights Consultative Committee and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights gave also some professional evaluations. Finally, this open and productive exchange of positions and assessments increased a practical significance of this research of the present Belarusian foreign policy measures concerning such topical and growing international challenge.

**Conclusion.** At the beginning of the 21st century the Republic of Belarus is one of the most consistent and principled advocates of a comprehensive understanding of the human rights promotion on a national and global levels. Considerable attention was paid to intensifying international cooperation in solving the most acute economic, social and humanitarian problems challenged all countries, regions and continents.

The most important tool for achieving this goal is an active cooperation with international partners, the UN bodies, organizations and
agencies to ensure the SDGs and strengthen the human rights agenda avoiding their politicization or using to exert pressure on other countries. The Republic of Belarus is making every effort to implement successfully all goals and targets of sustainable development directed to overcome the most significant global problems, and namely poverty, inequality, different types of discrimination, isolation and social exclusion.

Developing an equal and constructive dialogue with all international partners on a wide range of issues related to human rights and sustainable development is one of the most important tasks for the Belarusian foreign policy at this moment, as this mutually beneficial dialogue will make the modern world more stable and safe.

References


Key words: foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus; international cooperation; the UN; sustainable development; human rights; overcoming of poverty and social inequality.
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МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЕ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО РЕСПУБЛИКИ БЕЛАРУСЬ В СОДЕЙСТВИИ УСТОЙЧИВОМУ РАЗВИТИЮ И ПРОДВИЖЕНИИ ПРАВ ЧЕЛОВЕКА

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Продвижение прав человека, прогресс в области устойчивого развития и преодоление различных форм бедности на национальном, региональном и глобальном уровнях являются одним из важнейших направлений многосторонней дипломатии Республики Беларусь с момента обретения независимости в 1991 г. Опираясь на международный опыт Белорусской ССР как одного из основателей ООН, полученный в результате работы в ее основных органах, прежде всего Экономическом и социальном совете, а также специальных учреждениях, белорусская дипломатия наладила взаимовыгодное и эффективное сотрудничество с другими странами в решении многих важных проблем. Среди них такие ключевые и злободневные темы, как борьба с бедностью и неравным доступом к социальным благам и достижениям, а также преодоление регионального и структурного неравенства различных социальных групп и общин.

Всесторонний диалог с нашими ведущими международными партнерами, включая особую роль сотрудничества с Китаем, продолжался и успешно развивался в начале XXI в. Это позволило Республике Беларусь внести свой вклад в современное понимание прав человека в контексте глобального устойчивого развития. Достижение его целей (ЦУР) до 2030 г., согласованное всеми членами ООН, является одной из наиболее важных задач для политики Республики.
Беларусь и ее основополагающего видения продвижения прав человека в глобальном мире.

Наше их понимание основывается на универсальном, неделимом, взаимосвязанном, взаимозависимом и взаимополняющем характере. В деле обеспечения каждой из наиболее важных категорий прав человека: гражданских, политических, экономических, социальных, культурных следует придерживаться одинаковых позиций и относиться к ним с равным вниманием. Международное сотрудничество в этой сфере должно быть направлено на укрепление взаимного доверия и разработку эффективных многосторонних механизмов для решения важнейших глобальных проблем.

Республика Беларусь последовательно и решительно выступает против любых попыток их политизации и призывает к комплексному подходу к соблюдению всех категорий прав и свобод человека в рамках международного сотрудничества, не пытаясь выделить среди них приоритетные или свести их к минимуму.

Ключевые слова: внешняя политика Республики Беларусь; международное сотрудничество; ООН; устойчивое развитие; права человека; преодоление бедности и социального неравенства.


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