

DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE-BELARUSIAN RELATIONS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE INITIATIVE “ONE BELT — ONE WAY”

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Cino-Belarusian relations are discussed, with a focus on Belarus' role in the Chinese integration initiative “One Belt, One Way”, representing the Chinese vision of the path towards global development and resolution of humanity's problems. Strong partnership between Republic of Belarus and China in various spheres is emphasized and analysed, including in politics, economics, humanitarian, cultural, scientific and education. Evidence of the strategic nature of such partnerships is reviewed, and the relevance of the findings of this paper is presented for further research in the field of Belarusian-Chinese relations; as a source of specialist information, and for raising awareness and building understanding among the parties concerned.

Keywords: Chinese-Belarusian relations; the initiative “One Belt, One Way”; integration; foreign policy concept; strategic cooperation.

At present, the People's Republic of China is gradually becoming the second most important center of world politics, because China's economy is closely linked to the world economy. This fact obliges the Chinese leadership to put forward ambitious economic, political and cultural projects aimed not only at upholding national interests, but also at actively promoting ideas of an international character.

All this led to the appearance in 2013 of the Chinese large-scale strategic integration initiative “One Belt, One Way”, which was put forward by the President of the PRC Xi Jinping. This foreign policy concept of China is aimed at improving the socio-economic development of China in the new conditions, conditions of globalization and internationalization, significantly affecting the solution of economic and humanitarian problems. This concept is also aimed at expanding and deepening the policy of openness to the outside world, strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation with countries around the world.

Belarus expressed its intention to take an active part in implementation of the initiative of China.

The aim of the study is to identify and analyze problems in the development of Chinese-Belarusian relations, including in the framework of the initiative “One Belt, One Way”. To achieve this goal, the following **tasks** were set: 1) to analyze the integration interaction of the Republic of Belarus and China; 2) to determine the importance for the development of both countries of their cooperation in solving actual problems.

The Republic of Belarus and China are quite reliable partners in various spheres of life, as evidenced by stable friendly relations, comprehensive and fruitful business relationships of these

countries. In spite of the international situation, the Chinese-Belarusian relations continue to develop comprehensively and have reached a higher level. The fact that the Republic of Belarus is an important partner of China in the construction of “One Belt, One Way” has been repeatedly noted by the PRC Chairman Xi Jinping. In his opinion, both countries need to "make even greater efforts to strengthen trade and investment relations." In this regard, it is planned to hold the forum “One Belt, One Road” in 2019 based on the Chinese-Belarusian industrial park “The Great Stone” [1, p. 1].

In the context of globalization and integration, no state wishing to achieve prosperity can rely only on its own strength and capabilities. On this basis, the integration of the interaction of countries is crucial for their development, it contributes to the joint development and cooperation in solving actual problems arising in the life of society.

The initiative “One Belt, One Road”, borrowing the history of the ancient Silk Road, is a combination of two projects “The Economic Belt of the Silk Road” and “The Sea Silk Road of the XXI Century”. The purpose of this initiative is the following:

- Stimulation the overall development and prosperity of world civilization, based on the principles of joint discussion, joint creation and sharing;
- Activation of international partnership and cooperation;
- Implementation of matching the national development strategies of individual countries within the territories of the participants of the “One Belt, One Way”;
- taking advantage of the benefits of each participating country for the benefit of all, and thanks to this, together creating a society of common interests, a society with a single fate and a society with a single responsibility [1, p. 1].

The Chinese initiative will contribute to deepening integration into the world economy, creating a comprehensive open structure.

As part of the USSR, Belarus participated in the establishment of diplomatic relations and friendly contacts with the PRC and the support of China on the road to independence and liberation. Still in Soviet times, it became popular in China to learn Russian, which helped to strengthen friendship and the development of two close in spirit peoples [2; 3].

Having become independent and left the USSR, which ceased to exist on December 26, 1991, Belarus did not interrupt friendly and business relations with China, which was one of the first to recognize the independence of fifteen new states, including the Republic of Belarus. Already in the first years of Belarus’s independence, the institutional foundations of the Belarusian-Chinese relations were laid. Diplomatic relations between the countries were established on January 20, 1992. In 1993 and 1994, the Republic of Belarus and the PRC exchanged their embassies. Since

1994, a bilateral coordinating body, the Belarus-China Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation, has constantly been active.

The official statements of the Belarusian president, beginning with his first visit to China in 1995, emphasize the need to develop special relations with China, adopting the Chinese experience in economic management. However, bilateral relations began to develop more intensively from 2004–2005, when the relatively rapid growth in commodity turnover became noticeable; and plans for joint investment projects appeared. According to A. Shraibman, a researcher of these relations, the Belarusian-Chinese relations over the past period “gained the character of a strategic partnership, which was confirmed in July 2013 by signing a corresponding declaration”. In his study, the author cites data according to which the commodity turnover of the two countries grew from 450 million dollars in 2004 to 3.3 billion dollars in 2013 [4, p. 3].

Officials, as the media emphasizes, report that since 2006, the development of cooperation between Belarus and China is considered as one of the priority directions of the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus. Often, the media notes the unity of views of both countries on many problems of the world order; the Chinese model of economic, political and social development is considered as an example for other countries. Officials report on the various types of financial assistance that China provides to Belarus. Today, relations between Belarus and China, including joint activities to implement the Chinese initiative “One Belt - One Way”, both sides characterize as a strategic partnership, and the term “strategic” China always understands as the highest level of relations. This fact is indicated by the regular exchange of visits of officials at the highest and high levels, and the growth of trade. In January 2014, the countries approved the Program for the Development of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for 2014-2018, and a number of key areas of interaction are planned. In addition, the countries have signed more than 30 documents in various areas of joint activities.

At the same time, as the analyst of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) Andrei Yeliseyev emphasizes, referring to numerous public statements by Chinese diplomats, right up to the signing of a strategic partnership declaration (in July 2013 [5]), Belarus expects more of these relations than China. This feature permeates practically all spheres of bilateral cooperation [6].

Nevertheless, the PRC and the Republic of Belarus in the context of the Chinese initiative “One Belt, One Way”, the development of the Eurasian Economic Union have become reliable friends and important partners. In May 2015, the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping visited the Republic of Belarus, during which the heads of state signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation [7] and signed the Joint Declaration on the further development and deepening of relations in the framework of a comprehensive strategic partnership. At the same time,

special attention is paid to strategic cooperation in the field of politics, economics, humanitarian, cultural, scientific and educational spheres.

The political level of interaction between the Republic of Belarus and the PRC is based on a common value foundation, which include common views on world problems (speaking against the hegemony of individual states and the unipolar world, against using human rights in order to put political pressure on undesirable states organizations). It is based on the support each other when voting in international organizations.

At the same time, the similarity of political positions did not become a competitive advantage of the Republic of Belarus for trade and economic relations with the PRC and had no effect on their development.

The economic relations between Belarus and China are built on mutually beneficial terms: the PRC gained new sales markets for its products; the Republic of Belarus gained access to investments.

At the same time, there is also a negative point in trade and economic relations between two countries: the dynamics of China's and Belarus's merchandise trade is mainly ensured not by the Belarusian exports to China, but by a huge increase in Chinese imports (see the Belstat data: www.belstat.gov.by), which, in turn, causes an annually increasing outflow of currency from Belarus and contributes to instability in the country's currency market.

Goods exported by the Republic of Belarus to China are limited mainly to raw materials - potash fertilizers, nitrogen compounds, petrochemical products. And only about 10% is accounted for by engineering products and equipment. This situation is unprofitable for the economy of Belarus.

Financial and credit cooperation is more beneficial for Belarus, because Chinese banks and the government are quite active lenders in relation to a wide range of Belarusian projects, including the creation of a mobile operator Best, the modernization of Minsk CHP-2, the modernization of the Belarusian cement industry, the construction of Berezovskaya and Lukoml State District Power Plant, modernization of Svetlogorsk Pulp and Cardboard Plant, creation of a national satellite communications and broadcasting system in Belarus, construction of the Hotel "Peking", assembly production of passenger cars Geely and others. For the implementation of these projects, China has allocated soft loans.

The benefit for China in issuing such loans is that their issuance is burdened with the obligation to purchase from 50% to 70% of Chinese equipment. That means giving up the supplier's freedom of choice and forced consent to the quality of services and equipment that China can offer. Often, the Chinese labor is used to implement a specific investment project. Thus, China ensures its own export of goods and services [4, p. 4–5].

Unfortunately, not all of these and other projects became profitable. Some of them can be called problematic. For example, the mobile operator "Best" (later - "Life") was unprofitable and was sold to the Turkish company Turkcell. The quality of Chinese equipment is not always good.

Of particular note is the largest investment project of Belarus and China, the Chinese-Belarusian Industrial Park, the Decree on the creation of which was signed by the Belarusian President in 2012 [8]. In the course of its construction (beginning in June 2014), the President issued some Decrees on its improvement, which indicates the increased attention of the head of the state to this project. It is planned to locate production and residential, office and retail complexes, entertainment complexes, financial and research centers in the park.

Much is also being done in the framework of humanitarian, cultural, scientific and educational cooperation between the PRC and the Republic of Belarus. We can name cooperation between leading universities of the two countries in the field of education and science; the study of Belarusian schoolchildren and students of the Chinese language; the Days of Science and Technology; the participation of countries in specialized exhibitions, etc. Belarus and China signed agreements on cooperation between the State Committee on Science and Technology and the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus with committees on science and technology, regional academies of science and other organizations in Chinese provinces.

A developed legal and contractual framework has been created between the PRC and the Republic of Belarus: there are more than 80 bilateral treaties in two countries, which about 40 are intergovernmental and interstate. The existing bilateral treaties cover a wide range of issues that practically affect the most spheres of social activity.

Based on the above, we can draw the following conclusions:

The Belarusian-Chinese diplomatic, political, economic, humanitarian, cultural relations, as well as cooperation in the scientific and educational sphere, received a new round of development in connection with the active participation of the Republic of Belarus in the Chinese project "One Belt, One Way".

The strategic nature of the development of the Belarusian-Chinese relations is determined by the following factors.

From the very beginning of the formation of the Republic of Belarus as an independent state, bilateral relations have been friendly and mutually beneficial. China has been and has remained a reliable partner for Belarus, investing in Belarusian projects and creating new jobs for the Belarusian population, playing an important role in the new global economic architecture. The Republic of Belarus is of direct interest to Chinese enterprises, including for the sale of their products and the production of raw materials.

The governments of the two countries have agreed and successfully implemented a set of measures for the joint implementation of the “One Belt, One Way” concept.

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