

INITIATIVES OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS IN THE UNITED NATIONS ON GLOBAL SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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The article is devoted to the main initiatives of Belarus in the United Nations on global security and sustainable development. The reasons and content of these initiatives are analyzed. Two groups of proposals are outlined. The first of them tackle the social and economic challenges. Belarus comes from its position of a regional leader in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. The second group of initiatives directly or indirectly connected with the issues of global security. The impact of 2022 Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict on Belarusian initiatives is also revealed.

Keywords: Republic of Belarus; United Nations; Helsinki-2; global security; integration of integrations; sustainable development.

The Republic of Belarus has been an active member of the United Nations since 1945, during the Soviet period and after gaining independence. Belarus has repeatedly come up with a number of initiatives in the UN main bodies and specialized agencies aimed to achieve global goals. These proposals stemmed both from the positive experience of the development of the Belarusian state, as well as from regional challenges.

Attention to the social matters in the Soviet period of history also affected the character of these initiatives. At the 2005 UN summit, the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko put forward the initiative to form a broad international partnership to combat human trafficking. In 2010, the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons [1]. In line with it, the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, was created. Belarus initiated the establishment of a Group of Friends United in Combating Trafficking and the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons. The proposals in this sphere have become a hallmark of Belarus' activities in the UN.

The aggravation of the political and military situation in Eastern Europe, which began after the change of government in Kyiv in 2014 as the results of protests, the beginning of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and the establishment of Russian control over the Crimean Peninsula forced the government of the Republic of Belarus to put forward a number of important initiatives on confidence and security building measures. In addition to platform for peace negotiations between the conflicting parties in 2014–2015 and the Helsinki-2 initiative which was announced by Alexander Lukashenko at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly session in 2017, the Republic of Belarus took the initiative to link a wide range of integration associations – not only the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, but also the Chinese initiative “One Belt, One Road”, as well as others. This idea was voiced in the speech of the head of the Belarusian state at the 70th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2015. “If we manage to avoid unnecessary and dangerous confrontation between

integration models, to achieve their compatibility, complementarity, then eventually we will be able to create a global integration structure that would cover our entire planet, firmly connecting various regions and continents” [2], the President of the Republic of Belarus emphasized.

The government of the Republic of Belarus sought to create the image of a donor of regional and global security. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized several conferences on combating terrorism. The first of them, High Level International Conference “Preventing and Countering Terrorism in the Digital Age” was co-organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and took place in Minsk on October 9–10, 2018. Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov, the Head of the United Nations Office of Counterterrorism, as well as Under-Secretary-General Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Director-General of the UN Office in Vienna, both participated in this high-level meeting [3]. A year later, on September 3–4, 2019, the similar conference was held in Minsk once again. This time the event was co-organized by the United Nations Office of Counterterrorism under the label “Countering terrorism through innovative approaches and the use of new and emerging technologies”. An invitation to attend this conference was also sent to the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, but due to the tight schedule, the visit of the head of the organization did not take place.

The conference discussed innovative methods of combating the terrorist threat, including strengthening cooperation in the field of information security. President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko participated in the inaugural panel of the conference. He emphasized that successful preventing and combating terrorism can be implemented by concluding interstate and other agreements on ensuring information security. “From our point of view, the key elements of such agreements could be the ideas of digital sovereignty and neutrality, as well as countries’ non-interference in each other’s information resources”, he said [4]. The head of Belarus put forward an initiative to set up a “belt of digital good neighborhood”: “I would be glad if today we launch a “digital security wave” from Minsk, designed to strengthen ties between countries, increase the effectiveness of joint combating terrorism and other threats in cyberspace” [4].

Nevertheless, the Belarusian crisis of 2020 had a significant impact on character of further initiatives of the official Minsk in the global arena. The crisis became not only a milestone in the history of Belarus, but also a major regional event that marked the beginning of a sharp deterioration in the military-political situation in Eastern Europe. In such conditions the appropriateness of new initiatives in the field of regional and global security has decreased. For this reason, the subsequent initiatives of the Republic of Belarus in the United Nations have mainly focused on the challenges of a social and economic nature.

Using its experience as a regional leader in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the Republic of Belarus initiated the high-level online conference “Harnessing Inter-Regional Integration for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals” as the UNCTAD15 pre-event. This forum was held on May 20, 2021. The event was attended by high-level representatives of the states – presidencies

of various regional integration associations from around the world (the Eurasian Economic Union, the European Free Trade Association, MERCOSUR, ASEAN, the Andean Community and CARICOM), as well as by heads of secretariats of international organizations (the World Trade Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization, UNCTAD, UN Office in Geneva, all UN Regional Commissions). In his opening remarks, the Foreign Minister of Belarus V. Makei stated that “amid the complex geopolitical situation in the world and growing regional tensions as well as application of wider neo-protectionist and unilateral coercive measures, we urgently need a universal unifying agenda more than ever... Interdependency of integration entities will allow to avoid harmful competition of integrations and emergence of new dividing lines in the world” [5]. As a result of the conference, it was decided to create a platform for UNCTAD to give the opportunity for representatives of various regional integration projects to exchange experience in the best practices of institution building and external cooperation mechanisms. Deputy Foreign Minister of Belarus Yury Ambrazevich believes that the Eurasian Economic Union can lead the UN in promoting the topic of “integration of integrations” [6].

Official representatives of Belarus started to draw additional attention to social and economic issues in the United Nations after the tightening of sanctions pressure from Western countries. In the summer of 2021, the European Union and the United States (together with the United Kingdom and Canada) for the first time have imposed sectoral economic sanctions against the Republic of Belarus. The sanctions packages were even more tightened at the beginning of the winter of 2021, after the escalation of the migration crisis on the Belarusian-Polish border. In early February 2022, Lithuania blocked the transit of Belarusian exports through its territory. Thus, the key Belarusian export product, mineral potash fertilizers, lost the main transportation channel. It has caused not only direct economic damage to the Republic of Belarus, but also affected the global market of fertilizers. During a meeting with the UNCTAD Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan in mid-February 2022, then-Permanent Representative of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva Yury Ambrazevich drew attention to the unacceptability of the sanctions policy [7].

After the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict in February of 2022 and the tightening of the sanctions policy against Russia and Belarus, the imposition of an embargo on the import of Russian goods in the largest markets and the simultaneous blocking of Ukrainian products in ports, a number of the poorest countries faced the prospect of famine. On May 26, 2022, Deputy Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations Pavel Yevseyenko said at the UN Commission on Population and Development session that “the use of food and supply chains as an instrument of political pressure and economic blackmail is the height of cynicism and deliberate provocation” [8]. Belarusian diplomat called upon Western countries to think about the economic consequences of the sanctions policy. At the beginning of May 2022, the problem of global food security was taken into account in the UN Secretariat. “A meaningful solution to global food insecurity requires reintegrating Ukraine’s agricultural production and the food and fertilizer production

of Russia and Belarus into world markets, despite the war”, stated UN Secretary-General António Guterres at the Security Council meeting on Ukraine [9].

On May 20, 2022, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Belarus Valentin Rybakov participated at UN Security Council open debate on conflict and food security. Diplomat emphasized that the authors of the restrictions are busy looking for reasons to impose new sanctions, forgetting about the numerous conflicts in other regions of the world. “The authors of such sanctions were not ready to listen then and are not listening now to either international institutions, or experts, or representatives of countries where hunger and malnutrition threaten the survival of nations. ... Today, the UN Secretary-General noted a 30 percent increase in the price of staple foods, which poses a direct threat to people in Africa and the Middle East” [10]. The same day Valentin Rybakov also met with the UN Secretary-General. The sides discussed the issues of international food security in the context of geopolitical tensions and sanctions pressure [11].

A special personal message from the President of the Republic of Belarus to António Guterres was handed over by Valentin Rybakov. In this letter, Alexander Lukashenko emphasized that Belarus has always advocated strengthening global and regional security, as proved by the country’s numerous initiatives, including the Helsinki-2 on the need for a broad international dialogue on security. “Unfortunately, in a fundamental sense, we were not heard. The security architecture in Europe has failed. The unwillingness of Western countries to work on strengthening common and indivisible security, their disregard for legitimate interests and ignoring the concerns of other partners, primarily Russia, first resulted in trade, economic and information wars, and then provoked a hot conflict on the territory of Ukraine” [12]. The President of Belarus stressed that it is necessary to abandon the destruction of the UN and multilateral cooperation mechanisms, which is the result of the current policy of limiting the participation or even exclusion of individual countries from their work. “The time has come not even for Helsinki-2, but for a truly global and defining process involving all the leading international players in the spirit of San Francisco. The outcome of this process should be clear and transparent agreements on the rules of the new world order, which will provide security guarantees to all members of the international community for the foreseeable future” [12].

Thus, the initiatives of the Republic of Belarus in the UN can be divided into two groups. The first of them tackle the social and economic challenges. These proposals are aimed at raising the standards of well-being of people around the world. Belarus comes from its position of a regional leader in this area, shares its own experience in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals, and also coordinates its initiatives with other member states of the Eurasian Economic Union. The experience in social and economic matters accumulated in the Soviet period also plays significant role.

Another group of initiatives directly or indirectly affects the issues of global security. The trigger for such proposals was exacerbation of political and military tensions in the Eastern European region in the 2010s, which lead to the cooling of relations between Russia and Western countries. Success in the implementation of the initiatives of this group is ambiguous: it does not depend on the will of the Republic of

Belarus, but rather on the current balance of power and the willingness of the most powerful regional players to jointly solve security problems. In particular, the Belarusian initiatives of the 2010s were ignored due to the unfavorable climate of international relations in Eastern Europe. As of today, at the time of the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict, the problems of food security have become aggravated. The success of new peace initiatives will show up when direct and indirect parties to the conflict perceive that the rising costs of the conflict outweigh the benefits of its continuation.

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