

VISA-FREE REGIME AS AN INSTRUMENT OF ECONOMIC COUNTERACTION TO SANCTIONS

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The article deals with the visa-free regime introduced in Belarus in recent years, its history and indicators. Under the conditions of economic sanctions, which the European countries applied against our country, Belarus, in its turn, uses its geographical position as a factor that allows to counteract the sanctions by opening the borders for foreign tourists, in particular, the abolition of consular fees for European citizens. It is determined that, despite the abolition of entry visas, Belarus receives payment for services provided to foreign tourists and goods purchased by them in return for the amounts underpaid to the state budget; Belarusian enterprises pay taxes to the state budget from the proceeds received.

Keywords: visa-free regime, sanctions, tourist arrivals, foreign citizens, consular fee.

БЕЗВИЗОВЫЙ РЕЖИМ КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО ПРОТИВОДЕЙСТВИЯ САНКЦИЯМ

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В статье рассматривается безвизовый режим, введенный на территории Беларуси в последние годы, его история и показатели. В условиях действия экономических санкций, которые страны Европы

применили в отношении нашей страны, Беларусь, в свою очередь, использует географическое положение как фактор, позволяющий противодействовать санкциям за счет открытия границ для иностранных туристов, в частности, отмены уплаты консульского сбора для граждан Европы. Определено, что, несмотря на отмену уплаты въездных виз, Беларусь взамен недополученных в государственный бюджет сумм, получает оплату за услуги, предоставляемые иностранным туристам, и товары, приобретаемые ими; из полученных сумм выручки белорусские предприятия уплачивают налоги в государственный бюджет.

Ключевые слова: безвизовый режим, санкции, туристские прибытия, иностранные граждане, консульский сбор.

The development of international relations in the XXI century is accompanied by changes in the nature of international conflicts, which is associated with the objective reasons for changes in the geopolitical situation and the development of scientific and technological progress. On the one hand, there is the development of the globalization process, which is facilitated by the widespread introduction of information technology, on the other hand, the processes of decentralization and the creation of new centers of power are actively developing in the international system. Such opposition cannot but give rise to new forms of international conflicts and methods of their resolution [1].

Conflict in international relations is understood as a special type of foreign policy interaction between entities, primarily states, which is expressed in an acute clash of their interests and goals [2, p. 31].

To the peculiarities of conflicts of the «new generation» can be attributed factors that condition the presence of superiority of some states over others, for example, the role of economics and finance is intensified, the use of new technologies is intensified, on the basis of which some countries become more developed, and others lag behind in development. As a result, «there is a transition from a world dominated by classical wars

to a world dominated by economic and technological conflicts» [3, p. 428].

In recent years, economic sanctions (a tool of pressure and coercion to actions in which the party under pressure is not interested) have been increasingly intensely used. It is obvious that prohibitions in international trade pursue the goal of creating such an economic situation in the country, in which the consequences of sanctions will cause not only complicated economic problems, but also subsequent political ones.

The Republic of Belarus, being a sub-sanctioned state for many years, has fully felt the impact of such a policy. Taking into account the fact that the country is affected by too strong adversaries, which are the countries of Europe and the United States, it is difficult to count on adequate counteraction, which means that counteraction tools should include other methods.

The Republic of Belarus establishes its foreign policy based on a combination of the following factors: geography, national policy, economic resources and political will. Of these factors, the geographical factor is the strongest and most accessible in countering sanctions. Being in the center of Europe geographically, the Republic of Belarus seeks to maximize the use of its position as a «crossroads», and the attraction of tourists under the visa-free regime can be considered one of the manifestations of this use.

Visa-free regime of visiting a country has long been part of international practice. Visa-free regime is a regime of relations between states, under which citizens of these states are not required to obtain a visa to enter their territory.

In the recent history of Belarus, the visa-free regime system appeared in 2000 with the signing of the Agreement between the Governments of the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan on the operation of the visa-free regime. The next step was the decision to establish a visa-free entry to Belarus for official participants of the World Ice Hockey Championship and foreign tourists arriving for the

championship in the period from April 25 to May 31, 2014. Since July 12, 2015, visa-free entry of foreign tourists arriving through the border checkpoint «Bialowieza-Pererov» to the territory of Belovezhskaya Pushcha has been opened. The next step was to allow visa-free entry of citizens of other countries for the purpose of visiting the August Canal (since October 26, 2016).

The year 2017 marked the beginning of a more extensive introduction of the visa-free regime: from February 12 of this year, a visa-free regime was introduced for citizens of 80 countries with subsequent stay in Belarus for five days when crossing the border of the Republic of Belarus at the National Airport «Minsk» (established by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus «On Establishing a Visa-Free Procedure for Entry and Exit of Foreign Citizens» of January 9, 2017, No. 8 with subsequent amendments and additions). The development of the visa-free regime continued next year: from July 27, the period of stay for tourists was extended to 30 days (based on the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 295 of July 24, 2018). The first results of this policy showed that the number of tourist arrivals to Belarus through the National Airport «Minsk» in 2018 increased by almost 27 %, and since the extension of the period of stay to 30 days – by 43 % [4].

The year 2022 became a landmark in the visa-free regime policy: from April 15, this regime was introduced for citizens of Lithuania and Latvia, and from July 1 for citizens of Poland – i.e. the countries that, on their part, close the border for Belarusians.

As a result of this policy, 352,175 citizens of Latvia, 621,789 citizens of Lithuania and 113,640 citizens of Poland arrived in Belarus during the period of the visa-free regime, totaling 1,116,010 people (as of June 2, 2025) [5].

To compare the increase in arrivals, we will use the data as of January 13, 2025. The comparison of data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

**Arrivals of foreign citizens from Europe to Belarus
during the period of visa-free regime**

№	Indicators	As of 13.01.2025	As of 02.06.2025	Increase, people	Increase, %
1	Total number of foreign tourists arriving from Europe	1 116 010	1 116 010	79 373	7.7
2	Number of tourists arriving from Latvia	326 665	352 175	25 510	7.8
3	Number of tourists arriving from Lithuania	589 366	621 789	32 423	5.5
4	Number of tourists arriving from Poland	104 401	113 640	9239	8.8
5	Average increase per year			79 373	7.7
6	Average increase per month (4.5 months)			17 638	1.7

Source: [5; 6].

The given data confirm the correctness of the initial psychological assumption that citizens not only of friendly, but also of so-called «unfriendly» countries use the opportunity to visit a country that offers visa-free entry and stay on its territory for a period sufficient to familiarize themselves with it.

Data on foreign tourist arrivals under the visa-free regime are tracked by the State Border Committee of the Republic of Belarus, while the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus has not yet generated such statistics. Let us consider the dynamics of general indicators characterizing the number of trips of foreign citizens to the Republic of Belarus, presented on the official website of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus. These data are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Dynamics of the number of tourist trips of foreign citizens to the Republic of Belarus during the period of visa-free regime

Nº	Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1	Number of tourist trips of foreign citizens to Belarus, thousand people	11 501.0	11 832.1	3598.5	3361.0	4920.5	5678.4
2	Increase per year, thousand people.		331.1			1559.5	757.9
3	Increase per year, %		2.9			46.4	15.4
4	Average growth per month, thousand people		27.6			130.0	63.2
5	Average growth per month, %		0.24			3.9	1.3

Source: [7].

The statistics presented in Table 2 show the division of the selected period into two: the first – from 2018 to 2019 and the second – from 2022 to 2023, which is due to a general drop in all indicators in 2020 and in 2021. Obviously, in the period 2018-2019 after the introduction of the visa-free regime, the number of foreign arrivals increased, but the figures are still low, with an increase of 2.9 % per year. For the first year of the regime, when there is not yet widespread information about it, this is quite a normal figure. In the second growth period, from 2022 to 2023, the growth rate of arrivals is different: 46.4 % in 2022 compared to 2021 and 15.4 % in 2023 compared to 2022.

Visa-free regime implies the abolition of payments for visa processing, which are related to consular fees and are credited to the state budget of the Republic of Belarus. The introduction of visa-free regime from the point of view of tax legislation is an act of preferential treatment. It means that as a result of the introduction of visa-free regime the state budget of the Republic of Belarus will not receive an amount equal to the unpaid cost of visas. However, the money saved on the cost of visas is used by visitors to pay for services provided by their host country:

accommodation, meals, transfers within the country, excursion services and others. Taxes paid to the budget from the services revenues provided to foreign visitors and for goods purchased by them may in the aggregate amount to and even significantly exceed the amounts of unpaid visas.

Thus, we can state that visits to Belarus by foreign citizens within the visa-free regime show positive dynamics, and thus, have an impact on consumption in the country.

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