



ЦЭНТР ЕЎРАПЕЙСКАЙ ТРАНСФАРМАЦЫІ  
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN TRANSFORMATION

# **The European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarusian society: the current status and development problems**

Policy paper

**Andrei Yahorau**

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**Center for European Transformation**  
Minsk, Belarus

[cet@eurobelarus.info](mailto:cet@eurobelarus.info)

[cet.eurobelarus.info](http://cet.eurobelarus.info)

+375 29 6185388

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## Summary

The European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarusian society<sup>1</sup> was declared on 29 March 2012 by the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle. The initiative offers a new format of relations between Belarus and the European Union in addition to the existing tools. For the moment, it is not quite clear whether this initiative will be able to lead to real changes in Belarus and in its relations with the EU, or whether it is doomed to repeat the infaust destiny of the previous initiatives. The development of the European Dialogue on Modernization faces a problem characteristic of Belarus — the problem of the absence of coordination of Belarusian political actors' actions. It concerns not only traditional antagonism between the authoritarian state and the democratic opposition, but antilogous keynotes inside the opposition as well. The efficiency of the EDM depends on coordinated support on the part of inner Belarusian public and political subjects and Belarusian citizens. The factual material depicting the development of the initiative allows the author to substantiate the necessity of the convention and coordination of the position of various subjects, which is to actually set the stage for modernization reforms in Belarus (conventional modernization). Conventional modernization is contraposed to authoritarian modernization as a possible way of reforming Belarus' economy while the current political regime is preserved. Although there are certain benefits of such modernization for the growth of the population's well-being, the country as a whole incurs great expenses: the preservation of authoritarianism undermines the bases of Belarus' normal development in the long view. The movement on the way of conventional modernization will require, first of all, widening the representation of Belarusian public stakeholders in the European Dialogue on Modernization. In particular, in order to increase the transformational potential of the EDM, it is proposed to eliminate the strategic laxity of this initiative and to conceptually fix the EDM development purposes and principles, to carry out a structural reorganization of the EDM and to create in addition to the expert level a special level for stakeholders' communication, as well as to launch a wide media program aimed at promoting the ideas of the European way of modernization in Belarusian society.

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<sup>1</sup> See: **European dialogue on modernization with Belarusian society**: [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/press-corner/all\\_news/news/2012/european\\_dialogue\\_modernisation\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/press-corner/all_news/news/2012/european_dialogue_modernisation_en.htm). Hereinafter: European Dialogue on Modernization, EDM.

## Introduction

Throughout many years, Belarus remains a “black hole” in the structure of the European Neighborhood Policy. Obviously, the tools that the EU has do not work when it comes to this eastern neighbor, which makes it necessary to constantly seek for new approaches. After the presidential election in December 2010, which was ended by the mass arrests of opponents of the regime, Belarus dropped out of the process of normalizing its relations with the EU. By the moment of the 2010 election, the parties had been already almost ready to sign a joint intermediate plan which could have become the first step on the way of restoring their bilateral relations. These processes were actually broken by the Belarusian authorities that appeared to be unable to support the minimal for the EU level of correspondence to the standards of democracy and human rights. The EU reaction (the freezing of top-level contacts; the introduction of restrictive measures against the persons involved in the infringements of human rights and support of the repressive regime) made Belarus’ participation in the Eastern Partnership initiative even more limited.

However, the new series of measures introduced by the EU (the sum of restrictive measures and the expansion of support to the opposition and civil society) had not brought any visible results, which became the reason of launching a new initiative concerning Belarus in March 2012. The European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarusian society declared by the EU Commissioner Štefan Füle was urged to add a new process to the existing tools. The EDM offered Belarus’ political opposition, civil society, the Belarusian state, and the EU a format of coordinating the visions of a possible way of transformations in Belarus and supporting this process by the EU. Actually, the European Union proposed a process of a EDM about modernization because of the impossibility to fully assist Belarus with modernization within the limits of the Eastern Partnership program.

The purposes of the European Dialogue on Modernization are blurry enough because they are subordinated to the development of the internal situation in Belarus. In point of fact, the European Union does not set and cannot set any particularly concrete purposes, but puts them in dependence on the Belarusians’ readiness, ambition, and responsibility<sup>2</sup>. The minimal purposes which are implicitly put in the EDM are the preservation of the pro-European subjects in Belarus and, if possible, assistance with their strengthening (furthering the dialogue between them, working out a new positive program of changes for the country, etc.). It means the minimal variant of the EDM is *sui generis* “hibernation” for the pro-European subjects (opposition and civil society). The maximal purposes assumed to be possible within the EDM are the launch of a full-fledged dialogue *inside Belarus* between the state, opposition, and civil society *through the intermediary of* the EU. It is possible to metaphorically say that the EDM is a preparation of a “round table” on the transformation of Belarus. Accordingly, the purposes of the European Dialogue on Modernization can change in space from the minimal to maximal ones if there is the Belarusian party’s corresponding readiness.

It has been one year since the moment of the inception of the European Dialogue on Modernization, and there are already a lot of materials so as to evaluate the condition, course, and future prospects of the development of the EDM. Besides, in the light of the latest events, there is a quite good situation to express a number of concrete proposals aimed at strengthening the potential of its influence on the situation in Belarus. First, the initial (preparatory) phase of the EDM is finished and on the threshold of the further steps it is necessary to tally up, to consider shortcomings, and to make the necessary adjustments. Second, since the beginning of the year, Belarus’

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<sup>2</sup> **Gunnar Wiegand**, Director for Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, European External Action Service, said at a conference in the European Parliament (9 April 2013): “*The European Dialogue on Modernization is a dialogue, first of all, of the Belarusians concerning Belarus and for Belarus*”: <http://www.eppgroup.eu/event/EPP-Group-Conference%3A-Dialogue-on-Modernisation-with-Belarusian-Society>.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs has undertaken a number of initiatives in its attempt to adjust relations with the European Union, including the proposals to develop the European Dialogue on Modernization. The active consultations with the government of Belarus are still going on, but the parties have not come yet to the formulation of a definitive position concerning the EDM.

This document is called to answer some questions:

1. What are the keynotes (guidelines) of the main European and Belarusian stakeholders concerning the development of the European Dialogue on Modernization?
2. The Belarusian authorities' participation in the EDM — is it possible and on what conditions?
3. What steps should be made in order to reconstruct and change the format of the EDM so as to increase its efficiency?

## I. European Dialogue on Modernization: a schematic review

It has been one year since the moment of the inception of the European Dialogue on Modernization. Four expert working groups of the EDM<sup>3</sup> and a steering group that consists of coordinators of the expert groups and representatives of the embassies of the EU member states have been created during this time. The experts have defined thematic priorities of modernization reforms and plans of the future works on their preparation (mainly in the form of seminars and conferences). There have been joint meetings of representatives of the expert groups, political parties, structures of Belarusian civil society, and European diplomats concerning the questions of the actual development of the EDM, but in various formats and with various structures of participants. In a number of the EU member states (Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), thematic seminars under the aegis of the European Dialogue on Modernization have taken place. In April 2013, in the European Parliament, the faction of the European People's Party (EPP Group) initiated a conference dedicated to the questions of the efficiency of the development of the EDM. As a matter of fact, it became the first event of a high level that was specially dedicated to the problems of the development of this initiative<sup>4</sup>.

At the moment, the Belarusian authorities do not take any official part in the European Dialogue on Modernization. In some cases, separate state experts can participate in the events of the EDM, but only in those of an informal and non-official character. It is paradoxical but the participation of Belarusian oppositional political parties and movements in the EDM is also reduced to an absolute minimum and limited to formal participation in sporadic meetings organized by the EU Delegation to Belarus. At the same time, the participation of civil society structures has been very active both at the expert work level and at the special public events organization level. According to polls, Belarusian society's awareness of the European Dialogue on Modernization is 25%<sup>5</sup>. In the conditions of Belarus' closed informational field, it is possible to consider these results satisfactory; in many respects, it became possible thanks to the essential support of the EDM on modernization by the majority of the independent mass media.

The general coordination of the European Dialogue on Modernization in Belarus is carried out by the EU Delegation to Belarus and the steering group of Belarusian experts.

The previous stage of the EDM can be characterized as preliminary; it was limited to communication between its real and potential participants and by contour sketches of plans of future works aimed at working out modernization reforms. Since June 2013, it is planned to begin a new phase of the EDM supported by a two-year project of the European Commission in the amount of € 0,5 million. The previous phase of the EDM passed without any regular financial support, but with the organizational and technical participation of the European Commission and ministries of foreign affairs of some EU member states (during the organization of thematic seminars).

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<sup>3</sup> The following expert groups were formed within the framework of EDM: 1) Political dialogue and political reform; 2) Legal reform and internal affairs; 3) Economic and social reforms, and 4) Reforms of trade and regulation system.

<sup>4</sup> See: **EPP Group Conference 'The Dialogue on Modernization with Belarusian Society — A functioning new instrument?'**: <http://www.eppgroup.eu/event/EPP-Group-Conference%3A-Dialogue-on-Modernisation-with-Belarusian-Society>.

<sup>5</sup> The results of the IISEPS poll in December 2012 (see: **Fruit of the "Dialogue on Modernization of Belarus"**: <http://iiseps.org/analitica/17/lang/en>). It is also necessary to specify that according to other researches, the Belarusians' awareness of the EDM does not exceed 4,6% (see: *Dzianis Melyantsou, Alena Artsiomenka. Geopolitical preferences of the Belarusians: A Too Pragmatic Nation?*: [http://belinstitute.eu/sites/biss.newmediahost.info/files/attached-files/BISS\\_SA07\\_2013en.pdf](http://belinstitute.eu/sites/biss.newmediahost.info/files/attached-files/BISS_SA07_2013en.pdf)), which can be caused by methodological features of carrying out these studies — different techniques of sample design, distinctions in the tools, etc.

## II. Reflective digression: the situation of the researcher and the method

In many respects, the picture of the situation of the European Dialogue on Modernization depends on the way and angle of its contemplation. In the political analysis, a completely objective view is impossible, although it can be feigned by some researchers. In our analytics, we traditionally prefer another way and try to describe our own position and method openly. It gives the readers a chance to initially construct their mode of work with the text taking into account the author's involvement and not to be distracted by the reconstruction of the author's grounds. In this case, the author's position is caused, first, by his active involvement in the processes of widening civil society's participation in European-Belarusan relations (within the pale of the International Consortium "EuroBelarus"<sup>6</sup>) and, second, his desire to research the processes of European transformations in Belarus (within the bounds of the Center for European Transformation).

At the end of 2008, a group of civil society organizations in Belarus and the EU, united in the International Consortium "EuroBelarus", set it as a purpose to achieve Belarusian civil society's inclusion in the processes of accepting political decisions. This keynote coincides with the all-European understanding of the importance of civil society's participation in political relations, reflected in the principles of the "structural dialogue", "agenda of changes", and European Active Citizenship Charter. Developing this line, in 2009-2010, the Consortium "EuroBelarus" initiated the creation of the Belarusian National Platform of civil society<sup>7</sup> within the framework of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative. The National Platform is urged to promote the coordination of opinions inside civil society concerning the questions significant for the country, allowing civil society "to speak in one voice". Considering the European Dialogue on Modernization as an important tool of future transformations, "EuroBelarus" tries to fix the institutional status of the National Platform as a plenipotentiary participant of the EDM.

Implementing these keynotes, the International Consortium "EuroBelarus" has undertaken a series of actions aimed at expanding civil society's participation, as well as developing the European Dialogue on Modernization<sup>8</sup>. Experts of the "EuroBelarus" have actively participated in the thematic working groups of the EDM since the moment of its announcement in March 2012; the author of this text coordinates the work of the first thematic working group "Political dialogue and political reforms". Leaders of the Consortium "EuroBelarus" have initiated the process of negotiations of the National Platform with representatives of political parties and movements

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<sup>6</sup> See: International Consortium "EuroBelarus": <http://eurobelarus.info/en/consortium/>.

<sup>7</sup> **National platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum** (hereinafter: Belarusian National Platform of civil society, National Platform) is public communication and coordination site for civil society organizations in Belarus. The beginning of the National Platform formation (since April 2009) was launched by a series of conferences, public hearings and roundtables on issues of European-Belarusan cooperation and participation of Belarusian civil society in the EU Eastern Partnership initiative and the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF). In July 2010 the participants of regular conference took the decision to establish the National Platform of the EaP CSF. In regular conferences and consultations of the National Platform participate from 80 to 100 different civil society organizations of Belarus.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. see: **European Dialogue on Modernisation with Belarus**. Position paper (2 April 2012): [http://cet.eurobelarus.info/images/uploads/files/European\\_Dialogue\\_on\\_Modernisation\\_with\\_Belarus\\_position\\_paper\\_final\\_eng.pdf](http://cet.eurobelarus.info/images/uploads/files/European_Dialogue_on_Modernisation_with_Belarus_position_paper_final_eng.pdf); **How to increase the transformational potential of the European Dialogue on Modernisation with Belarusian society?** Position paper (18 March 2013): <http://cet.eurobelarus.info/files/File/National%20Platform%20OSS%20Position%20Paper%202013-1-final-eng.pdf>.

concerning the coordination of actions and the possible agenda of the EDM<sup>9</sup>. In December 2012, as part of the order of the National Platform, the Consortium “EuroBelarus” carried out a special event dedicated to the questions of the EDM in the format of an organizing activity game (OAG). The OAG called the “European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarus: challenges, problems, and possibilities”<sup>10</sup> gathered participants from the expert groups of the EDM, representatives of civil society organizations, political parties and movements, international organizations (in total — 37 participants). During five days, the participants of the game worked to restore the plan, purpose, and object matter of the European Dialogue on Modernization, to analyze the current status of its implementation, to reveal obstacles and problems, and to work out program suggestions concerning the EDM development. The process of the preparation and carrying-out of the OAG presented unique possibilities to study the course of the EDM, to express opinions and guidelines of all its participants, and to understand the existing problems and disagreements.

In February 2013, as part of the coordinators of the thematic working groups of the EDM, the author participated in the visit to Brussels organized by the European External Action Service. During the visit, there were a number of meetings in the EU structures, in particular — with the initiator of the EDM — EU Commissioner Štefan Füle, various departments of the European Commission and European External Action Service, as well as deputies of the European Parliament. The contents of these meetings are also used as a research material while writing this document.

Such a long study by action<sup>11</sup> provides possibilities to deeply immerse in the situation and then to describe it. The basic difficulty of this method is the duality of the position of an active participant of the events and a researcher, which is partially removed by the objectivization of this problem in this reflective digression.

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. see: Internet video recording cycle “Paradak dnia” (“Agenda”) with the participation of the Chairman of the Coordinating Committee of the Belarusian National Platform of Civil Society **Uladzimir Matskevich**, Head of the Movement “For Freedom” **Aliaksandr Milinkevich**, and the leader of the Civil Campaign “Tell the Truth” **Uladzimir Niakliaeu** (in Belarusian): <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL61E3132394DAC910>.

<sup>10</sup> See video of the OAG “European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarus: Challenges, Problems and Opportunities” (in Russian): <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJy4Fqf4wMv6nu9m8Vel6pPHV61QG3bmi>.

<sup>11</sup> About the method of studying by action, see: *Uladzimir Matskevich. Belarusian democracy: athwart obviousness // Uladzimir Matskevich. Athwart Obviousness. — Nevsky Prostor, 2006 (in Russian): [http://eurobelarus.info/files/File/Vopreki%20ochevidnosti\\_3.pdf](http://eurobelarus.info/files/File/Vopreki%20ochevidnosti_3.pdf).*

### III. Analysis of stakeholders: keynotes and positions of participants of the EDM

In order to understand the general situation, it is necessary to review the actual positions and roles of its main participants (the European Union, Belarusian civil society, Belarusian oppositional parties, and the Belarusian authorities) in the development of the European Dialogue on Modernization.

#### The European Union: principled definiteness and tactical flexibility

As a whole, the European Union treats the European Dialogue on Modernization as a long process of searching for an effective format of coordinating interests of various parties (multi-stakeholder dialog) concerning future transformations in Belarus. Nevertheless, the institutions of the European Union have different interests and play various roles concerning the EDM. Their perceptions of the course of the EDM and its development directions have some differences. The positions of the EU member states, the European External Action Service, the European Commission and the European Parliament are to be taken into account minimally.

**The European External Action Service (EEAS)** carries out a *general coordinating* role of all European structures concerning the EDM. The EEAS, as well as the European Commission, are the basic actors in the planning and implementation of the European Dialogue on Modernization on the part of the EU. As the main foreign policy service, the EEAS is directly interested in the success and advancement of the EDM. The EU Delegation to Belarus, which is directly responsible for the EDM course in Belarus, is accountable to the EEAS and the European Commission.

**The European Commission (EC).** The European Commission is responsible for *implementation* aspects: from the establishment of the general frameworks of the EDM to its financial provision. An important political role of the EC concerning the EDM is additionally defined by the fact that the official initiative to launch it belonged to the EC and directly the EU Commissioner Štefan Füle. The EC general departments and their experts can be involved to help the work of corresponding expert groups of the EDM. A decision on the financial support of the second stage of the EDM is also accepted by the EC. Both European Commission and EEAS are now focused on the *strengthening of civil society* as a stakeholder of the European Dialogue on Modernization<sup>12</sup>. State participation is considered as possible and perspective, if the political prisoners are freed and if the general meaning, purposes, and structure of stakeholders of the EDM are preserved<sup>13</sup>.

**The European Parliament (EP).** The European Parliament is much less involved in the implementation questions of the European Dialogue on Modernization and foreign policy as a whole. The Parliament often has an off-balance presentation of the situation of the European EDM, which leads, in particular, to the overestimation of the role of Belarusian oppositional forces (parties, movements, and their leaders) in the development of the EDM and their influence on the general situation in Belarus. Nonetheless, it is the Parliament and the EU Council that after the Lisbon Treaty are the political institutions that make strategic decisions. Budget appropriations for foreign policy directions are also in the competence of the EP, which will be especially important while supporting modernization reforms in the future. The place of the EDM in the general agenda of the EU eastern policy in many

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<sup>12</sup> See: **EU-Belarus Discussing ways to strengthen the European Dialogue on Modernization**. European Commission. Memo. Brussels, 20 February 2013: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-13-128\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-128_en.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Adherence to these positions was voiced during the meeting with representatives of the European Commission and European External Action Service during the visit of the EDM steering group to Brussels.

respects depends on the Parliament position. In the light of the preparation of a parliamentary report on the EU policy concerning Belarus, which first presentation is going to take place in spring-summer 2013<sup>14</sup>, there is actually a good context for the development of the EDM topic<sup>15</sup>.

**The EU member states.** The EU countries are involved in the European Dialogue on Modernization at the level of their ministries of foreign affairs and embassies in Minsk. In Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, there were events (thematic seminars) under the aegis of the EDM. The very fact of carrying out such seminars looks positive as it provides the EDM process with some dynamics and makes the member states included in the process. However, almost all seminars are little included in the logic of the EDM movement in Belarus and are organized without active consultations with the Belarusian party (some exception here is the Berlin seminar on the social policy in February 2013 where such consultations passed in a minimum mode). The member states are ready to spur the EDM development, but, due to the absence of clear proposals from the Belarusians and as a consequence of the general quibbling strategic guidelines of the dialogue, they are limited to symbolical support actions.

*Even though the keynotes (guidelines) of all the EU institutions do differ, the European Dialogue on Modernization looks like a place of application of forces for possible changes in Belarus. The purposes of the European Union concerning the EDM are coordinated, although movable and changeable. The EU does not set and cannot set any particularly concrete purposes, but puts them in dependence on the Belarusians' readiness, ambition, and responsibility, as well as the general development of the situation. The EU is ready to support the strengthening of civil society and its aspiration for changes (in the minimum program) and to support consecutive reforms of Belarus' modernization (in the maximum program).*

### Belarus: antagonistic guidelines of participants

**Civil society.** Structures of Belarus' civil society are the most interested and active stakeholder of the European Dialogue on Modernization. The Belarusian National Platform of civil society, uniting at the moment about 60 public organizations, is actively involved in the EDM processes and tries to play a strategic and directing role in its development. Besides several independently organized public events dedicated to the EDM, the National Platform has established special relations with the steering group and has a lecturer for the National Platform in its structure. At the same time, civil society organizations have not managed to coordinate the agenda of the EDM with their nearest allies — oppositional political parties and movements of Belarus. The negotiations on the coordination of actions within the scope of the EDM, organized by the National Platform, have failed. Oppositional politicians have actually refused cooperation and ignored all further special events dedicated to the strategic planning and coordination of actions. An important role in the work of the expert groups of the EDM is played by independent expert organizations (think-tanks). The project of the Information Bureau of Solidarity

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<sup>14</sup> The report on the EU foreign policy concerning Belarus is being prepared by **Justas Paleckis**, a deputy of the faction Progressive alliance of socialists and democrats, for the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament. See the interview: **Paleckis: The opposition expresses less pessimism than I expected** (in Russian): <http://euroradio.fm/ru/report/paleckis-oppozicija-vyrazhaet-menshe-pessimizma-chem-ya-ozhidai>.

<sup>15</sup> For more details, see: **Alena Zuikova. European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarusian society: view from Brussels:** <http://cet.eurobelarus.info/en/news/2013/04/21/european-dialogue-on-modernization-with-belarusian-society-view-from-brussels.html>.

with Belarus (Warsaw) has promoted the organization of a wide and effective campaign to informationally support the dialogue in the mass media.

The situation in civil society is complicated by the fact that the purposes of different public and political groups can differ essentially from each other. As for the EDM, it is possible to see two groups of public structures with different purposes. The majority of the organizations of the National Platform (in particular, the organizations from the structure of the International Consortium “EuroBelarus” and the organization sharing the strategic keynotes of “EuroBelarus”) consider the EDM as a tool of democratization of the country, let in a long-term prospect. The other part, first of all, structures of the political opposition, a part of expert organizations (IPM Research Center, Belarusian Institute of Strategic Studies (BISS), etc.), a part of business associations, and socially-oriented organizations, considers the EDM as a tool of their own strengthening, reception of additional legitimization and some symbolical and status benefits from the EU. These public groups carry out functions that are important for the country and society and have some level of cooperation and interaction with the state. The achievement of the maximal purposes of democratization in the EDM may seem desirable for them, but they will not seriously risk their normal functioning and interaction with the state right now (the purposes of a higher “political” order mean higher risks for them)<sup>16</sup>.

**Oppositional political parties and movements.** Except for some rhetorical statements supporting the European Dialogue on Modernization, the oppositional forces in Belarus do not actually participate in the EDM. During the 2012 parliamentary election campaign, none of political structures mentioned the topic of the EDM; they organized no special events or informational campaigns; numerous attempts of the National Platform to coordinate strategic questions of participation in the EDM were ignored by oppositional politicians. The participation of oppositional political parties and movements is reduced to their presence at separate meetings organized by the EU Delegation to Belarus. Political forces apply for a special status in the EDM and in relations with the EU (another level of relations, a special place). It is for this very reason that they do not want to cooperate with civil society within the frame of the EDM, being afraid of losing the status and equalizing politicians and leaders of civil society in relations with the EU.

**The Belarusian authorities.** Officially, the Belarusian authorities do not participate in the European Dialogue on Modernization, neither at the level of ministries, nor at the technical level of officials and state experts. The high level of the participation of the state is limited by the EU by the condition to release the political prisoners. The technical level of participation, which is allowed by the EU, in its turn, cannot be accepted by the Belarusian state. The Belarusian authorities reject the necessity of performing any conditions of the EU (by the principle “all or anything”). Besides, the authorities do not wish to admit even indirectly the subjectness of civil society and to provide it with any weight and legitimacy by sitting with its representatives at “one table”.

Since January 2013, the Belarusian authorities have been making steps to start a new round of negotiations with the EU so as to restore relations. In February, Belarus’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent to the EU member states a letter with a rather categorical offer: to unconditionally raise the rank of the diplomatic relations of Belarus with the EU; it also expressed its readiness to join the EDM, if the opposition and civil society are excluded from it<sup>17</sup>. It

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<sup>16</sup> About the contradictions in the approaches of changing the situation in Belarus, see: *Andrei Yahorau, Andrei Shutau. Mapping civil society of Belarus.* Briefing paper (1 June 2012): [http://cet.eurobelarus.info/images/uploads/files/Mapping\\_civil\\_society\\_of\\_Belarus.pdf](http://cet.eurobelarus.info/images/uploads/files/Mapping_civil_society_of_Belarus.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> See: **Minsk finally gets interested in the European dialogue on modernization:** <http://euroradio.fm/en/report/minsk-finally-gets-interested-european-dilogue-modernization>.

has allowed some Belarusian analysts to propose to split the EDM into two parallel tracks: one — for cooperation with the state, the other one — for civil society<sup>18</sup>.

*Unlike the EU, the Belarusian stakeholders' positions are not only non-coordinated with each other, but also antagonistic. In this "war of all against all", only civil society looks like a subject ready to cooperate; however, it is not uniform, and cooperation with it is not considered as beneficial by neither state, nor political opposition.*

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<sup>18</sup> The explanation of the essence of this position, see: *Alexei Pikulik. Monologue about the Dialogue. Marginalia of one trip* (in Russian): <http://belinstitute.eu/ru/node/690>; *Dzianis Melyantsou. About the uncertain destiny of the Dialogue* (in Belarusian): <http://belinstitute.eu/ru/node/571>.

#### IV. On the threshold of a new stage of the EDM: problems and obstacles

The European Dialogue on Modernization faces several groups of obstacles and problems generated mostly by the inner situation in Belarus, not by external circumstances. In general, it is possible to specify obstacles at the level of the EDM strategy and plan, communication and relations between the stakeholders, and performing competences of participants.

1. **Strategic uncertainty.** The purposes and plan of the EDM are quite vague<sup>19</sup>; the EDM has no accurate, documentary fixed strategy of development in the form of sequence of stages, planned results. The EDM has no clear structure of management, accurate distribution of responsibility, etc. The general development of the EDM reminds of incremental advancement while its purposes are changing depending on the situation. On the one hand, it raises the degree of flexibility and provides a chance to quickly react to changes of the situation. On the other hand, it creates chaos and a feint of dynamics without any possibility to say whether the EDM is moving or not. In the absence of any strategic definiteness and clear rules of getting included in the EDM, even if they wish to, it is difficult for the EU member states to spur the EDM; therefore, many events organized by them pass without any effect for Belarus.

2. **Absence of the subject of communication from the Belarusian side.** In the situation of the inconsistency of positions and contradictions between all subjects of the European Dialogue on Modernization, the place of the subject of communication from Belarus appears to be vacant. The state refuses to participate in the EDM; the opposition agrees, but does not participate; civil society could do it, but it is not admitted by any of the parties and it is presented by numerous organizations with different interests. The problem of the variety of opinions inside civil society is partially removed by the presence of the Belarusian National Platform of civil society as a platform coordinating interests, which is able to speak in “one voice”, but it is not recognized by the other subjects, including the EU. The absence of the Belarusian partner in the EDM puts the EU in a quite strange position when the dialogue seems to exist, but there is nobody to talk to. Inter alia, it leads to the situation when the EU (and in particular — the EU Delegation to Belarus) starts to manage the whole process, from setting purposes to accepting results.

3. **Public stakeholders’ weak involvement in the EDM.** Inter alia, the EDM is aimed at spreading the vision of contemporary and democratic Belarus among wide public layers, i.e. at creating a clear alternative of the development of the country. It is possible when a wide circle of stakeholders is involved in the EDM: NGOs, trade unions, associations of employers, religious public organizations, local communities, etc. Their role is, on the one hand, to order and set purposes for reforms and, on the other hand, to spread them among wider social classes. Only such wide involvement of many public subjects will be able to spur a change of the position of the state. The same structures will be necessary for the normal implementation of reforms, monitoring, and evaluation of the reforming course.

4. **The problem of competences.** This problem arises as a consequence of the previous two problems. In the absence of the high levels of stating purposes, the expert groups are left to their own devices and work without

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<sup>19</sup> As it has already been mentioned above, the European Dialogue on Modernization arises as a compensation for the impossibility of normal bilateral relations. The structure of the EDM topics repeats the structure of the Joint Interim Plan (JIP) of bilateral interaction within the context of the Eastern Partnership, which, in its turn, repeats the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs). The EU would like to build normal relations with Belarus, as well as with the other countries of the Eastern Partnership, but is compelled to lower the level of relations with Belarus because of the political conditions in the country.

the order from stakeholders. Besides, at the level of the structure of the EDM expert groups, there is a mixture between representatives of political structures and stakeholders of civil society, representatives of organizations of the target groups (grassroots organizations) and actually professional experts and specialists. Such a variegated structure is not adapted absolutely to the needs and order of the organization of the normal expert work aimed at preparing reforms. The expert groups consist of people with different qualifications, different experiences, and different ideological, political, and personal guidelines. All these make the expert groups almost unable to work deeply and substantially<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Such a situation has developed because of the initially erroneous logic of the formation of expert groups. Experts were delegated to the groups by the political opposition that had been asked by the EU Delegation to Belarus. At the same time, civil society organizations, including the Belarusian National Platform of civil society, had not been asked to delegate experts. Then, the EU Delegation to Belarus invited experts to come to the meetings of the working groups. Experts themselves, in the overwhelming majority, are not involved in political structures; they were not informed who had delegated them and why they were invited to the EDM meetings.

## V. What do the Belarusians want? Alternative strategies of developing the EDM

Today, the necessity to structurally reorganize the European Dialogue on Modernization is obvious. Otherwise, the existing contradictions will result in the emasculation of any real sense from the EDM process and will transform it into a set of reporting events, which is already partially happening now. For the moment, the choice is between the process of coordinating positions of different parties concerning future transformations in the country and direct modernization already today without a basic change of the existing conditions. Accordingly, there are two alternative strategies of reorganizing the EDM; each can lead to the strengthening of the EDM transformational potential:

**1. Support of authoritarian modernization.** This way assumes the creation of a parallel track of relations between the EU and the Belarusian state on the analogy of the EU-Russia initiative Partnership for Modernization. In this case, the accent in the EDM is transferred to economic reforms and reforms in separate sectors (energetics, transport, trade, etc.) which the Belarusian state is interested in most of all. More sensitive topics of political and legal reforms are discussed in the opinions exchange mode. Civil society and political opposition are at a parallel level of interaction with the EU and their functions are reduced to monitoring of interstate interaction and presentation for discussion of alternative projects of reforms.

**2. Support of conventional modernization.** Traditionally, the way of authoritarian modernization is opposed to democratic modernization. In either case, modernization is carried out from one power center, but democratic transformation means a change of the authoritarian elite by supporters of democratic transformations. For many reasons, such contraposition is not adequate to the Belarusian situation where there is a conflict balance between supporters of authoritarian and democratic ways of development. The split line goes through all public strata: from political and cultural elites to ordinary inhabitants<sup>21</sup>. In Belarus, the authoritarian model dominates at the expense of the resources of the state machine which is controlled by the authoritarian leader, but the authoritarian system does not completely suppress alternative civil and political activity. The authoritarian way of modernization is opposed by the strategy of conventional (negotiated) modernization where transformations can be the result of the public convention on reforms between two alternative parts of society. The European Dialogue on Modernization in this case can be a means of achieving such political consensus of many stakeholders (multi-stakeholder dialogue).

Both ways have positive and negative sides. The implementation of alternative decisions on the European Dialogue on Modernization reorganization in each case will face special obstacles and restrictions, will require investments of different types of resources, and will lead to absolutely different consequences.

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<sup>21</sup> About Belarusian society's polarization, see Belarusian sociologists' opinions: **Aleh Manaev: Authorities haven't been bridging the gap between Belarusians for 18 years:** <http://eurobelarus.info/en/news/society/2013/02/12/aleh-manaev-authorities-haven-t-been-bridging-the-gap-between-belarusians-for-18-years.html>; *Yury Drakakhrust. Belarus — a “split” state?* (in Russian): <http://n-europe.eu/tables/2011/09/28/belarus-%E2%80%93-raskolotoe-gosudarstvo>; *Oleg Manayev. Belarus: an undecided country in the center of Europe?* (in Russian): <http://review.w-europe.org/7/2.html>.

### Possibilities of authoritarian modernization in Belarus

The ideas of “involving” (or “critical involving”) the regimes similar to the Belarusian one in closer interaction with the EU regularly appear on the agenda. The basic assumption is that such cooperation results in irreversible transformations of authoritarian regimes. The grounds for such assumptions are a number of rational and irrational factors. Rationalism is supported by the samples and prototypes of successful authoritarian modernization (Singapore, South Korea, Chile, etc.). Also, it is supported by the irrational belief in the pragmatism and purposeful rationalism of today’s authoritarian regimes. The cyclic recurrence of the appearance of offers to renew cooperation with authoritarian states has also to do with the general crisis of the European program of democratization. The arsenal of means of the EU foreign policy in relation to non-democratic regimes appears to be too narrow, and when sanctions and isolation do not work, there appear voices about the necessity to renew the involvement policy.

Today, a similar process begins concerning Belarus. After the crisis of December 2010, the set of actions in the form of restrictive measures and expansion of civil society support has not brought any visible results. Now, the pendulum of the European policy can move towards cooperation with the Belarusian state. The only obstacle for such a scenario is the release of the political prisoners, or, at least, the guaranteed process of this release which both parties will be sure of.

As for the implementation, the state can be involved in the European Dialogue on Modernization if some obstacles are eliminated. First, the Belarusian authorities must be allowed not to admit the subjectness of civil society and political opposition in Belarus (“to sit with them at one table”). Second, it is necessary to depoliticize the most important areas of cooperation, i.e. the EU’s support of modernization should not be strictly conditioned by the progress in the field of democracy and human rights. Then the structure of the EDM can be changed as follows:

1) A special format of interaction with the EU is created for the state; it will presuppose:

- Periodic summits (1-2 times a year). In the minimal variant — meetings of the Belarusian government with the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle, and, slightly less often, with the EU high representative on foreign affairs;
- Dialogues about reforms in separate sectors. Sectors will be defined proceeding from mutual interests of the Belarusian state and the EU. First of all, Belarus is interested in the inflow of foreign investments, modernization of enterprises, growth of the power efficiency of its economy, expansion of trade with the EU, and infrastructure development (transport, communication, etc.). The European Union, while it is generally interested in the stability and safety of Belarus, will pay attention, first of all, to the aspects of ecological safety, economic stability, power efficiency, transport, and transit of power resources. Besides, the adjacent questions of interaction will be opened — thus, the questions of economic reforms will be linked to the questions of the fight against corruption and reforms of some aspects of justice, the trade questions — with mobility expansion etc.;
- A separate dialogue about democratic reforms and human rights. The questions sensitive for the Belarusian regime should belong to a separate direction which progress will depend on the readiness of the Belarusian party to make concrete steps. The process of sectoral dialogue should not depend directly on the progress in the dialogue about democracy. The EU can stimulate the process of

democratic reforms, but not put direct conditions on democratization in order to widen its support in the sectoral reforms.

- 2) There must be a special place for the EU's interaction with Belarus' civil society and political opposition (like the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum or the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum). The role of this place will be aimed at monitoring the processes of interstate interaction and voicing the actual problems in the country, including the questions of democracy and human rights. The Belarusian state's participation in this Forum will be desirable, but it itself should define the degree of its inclusion.

Thus, the reconstructed EDM will be directed on the distribution of the European experience of transformations, implementation of concrete projects making Belarus closer to the EU standards of regulation, and gradual improvement of the economic and political situation in the country. The EDM process will be built as a slow step-by-step movement (incrementalism) towards Belarus' performance of all necessary conditions in order to establish normal relations with the EU. The process should come to the end with the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (or its analog) and then — the Association Agreement.

The implementation of the authoritarian modernization scenario can lead to some positive results if the following conditions are met:

- 1) Progress in some sectoral economic reforms: infrastructure, energetics, modernization of durable means of production, power efficiency, ecological standards and "green" technologies, insignificant privatization of middle enterprises, development of small and middle enterprises;
- 2) Some progress in separate spheres of the legislative regulation connected with economic reforms (activity of small and middle enterprises, appeal courts, taxation, etc.);
- 3) General growth of the economic stability and consumer well-being of the population in Belarus;
- 4) Removal of the long political tension in the EU's bilateral relations with Belarus and the normalization of relations in the near future (5-7 years);
- 5) Partial liberalization of the activity of civil society organizations in the areas where this activity compensates the shortage of the state resources (alternative social help, granting of specific services, expert knowledge, etc.).

The obvious benefit of such a scenario for the EU will also be the fact that the EU will not have to "invent" any new and "special" approaches for Belarus — it will be enough to use the already existing models of interaction with Russia and Caucasian authoritarian regimes. The picture of authoritarian modernization looks rather attractive if not to take into consideration the necessary costs, conditions of feasibility, and possible risks.

The **costs** of authoritarian modernization:

- 1) Strengthening of the authoritarian regime in Belarus and the de-facto recognition of the defeat of the EU actual policy in the field of democratization;
- 2) The further degradation of the opposition and civil society. Without possibilities for their normal functioning and solving the tasks they have to solve, public-political structures will quickly turn into corrupted organizations feigning political activity (that is already happening to some extent). The achievements of the active part of civil society will be lost;

- 3) Postponement of reforms in the spheres subordinated to ideological tasks (culture, education, mass media) and the spheres connected with the bases of the authoritarian government (privatization of large state enterprises, labor market, bank sector);
- 4) Preservation of some level of repressions, infringements of human rights, and suppression of public freedoms in Belarus. It does not demand from the EU a full withdrawal from its axiological keynotes, but it will have to refuse the principle “first — democratization, then — cooperation”.

**Conditions** of the feasibility of authoritarian modernization:

- 1) The EU should stop expecting fast democratization counting on long-term changes (15-20 years);
- 2) The Belarusian regime should act as a pragmatic, rational, and predictable partner adhered to the movement on the way of transformations.

Implementation **risks** are created by:

- 1) Uncontrollable public processes (revolts, revolutions). This risk is improbable in the conditions of Belarus, but society is split concerning the basic axiological orientations, and therefore there is still a possibility of mass disorders;
- 2) “Unpredictable stability” or risks of the closed system. Rationality and pragmatism of authoritarian regimes are always conditional; power uncontrolled by society is full of any excesses (mass repressions, prosecution of minorities, private property nationalization, etc.), which has been demonstrated many times by Lukashenko's regime.

Thus, the choice of such a scenario of the development of the European Dialogue on Modernization will make it possible to construct a more contemporary system that will be able to sustain external shocks and risks. However, this system will remain authoritarian and therefore — potentially non-stable. The cost of the implementation of this scenario will be the degradation of humanitarian spheres of life and essential recession of public-political activity. If there is readiness to incur these costs, the EDM can be reoriented on the way of modernization of Belarusian authoritarianism.

### Conventional modernization

Belarusian society is split into two parts at all levels: from a choice of different state symbols to differently-oriented geopolitical orientations and opposite preferences concerning economic models. This basic public split is reproduced in all social groups and strata, from intellectuals to common people. The uniqueness of Belarusian society, according to Belarusian sociologists, is that in the country there is a social base and political forces for the implementation of straightly opposite scenarios and forecasts<sup>22</sup>. In relation to modernization, it means that any offered scenarios of transformations will face resistance of one of the parts of society. The authoritarian modernization described above will also face resistance and it will become possible only if one part imposes its

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<sup>22</sup> See: **Aleh Manaev: Authorities haven't been bridging the gap between Belarusians for 18 years:** <http://eurobelarus.info/en/news/society/2013/02/12/aleh-manaev-authorities-haven-t-been-bridging-the-gap-between-belarusians-for-18-years.html>.

variant of transformations. Successful modernization is possible only if the Belarusians' basic consent concerning modernization is establishment.

In this case, the European Dialogue on Modernization will be directed on the establishment of such consensus. As for the organization, it demands:

- 1) Expansion of the number of stakeholders of the EDM. Various types of public and political stakeholders should be invited to this level (civil society organizations, associations of employers, trade unions, religious public organizations, political parties, etc.). They should be presented in the EDM by corresponding real actors in Belarus, consolidating some number of one-type structures (for example, the Belarusian National Platform of civil society as a representative of several civil society organizations in the dialogue).
- 2) Revision of the role of the expert groups of the EDM. Because of their mixed structure, the existing expert groups are not adapted to perform any substantial work. It is necessary to leave them the role of advisory councils for criticism and evaluation of proposals of reforms and the general movement of the EDM. The structure of the expert groups are formed by stakeholders of the EDM.
- 3) Creation of temporary scientific-research collectives to work out reforms and to organize accompanying studies. These collectives should consist of qualified experts in the areas which must be reformed.
- 4) Organization of a special media program to support processes of the EDM and to inform Belarusian society.

Such an approach to the European Dialogue on Modernization cannot provide fast and direct progress in the modernization of Belarus; it is more likely aimed at creating a corresponding public-political context for modernization. Conventional modernization is more difficult in respect of its implementation as there are no settled norms and samples which can be borrowed from the previous or actual practice of the EU (unlike authoritarian modernization). Nonetheless, conventional modernization will be able to provide:

- 1) Wide public groups' changes of moods and keynotes concerning modernization;
- 2) Achievement of some level of consensus between socio-political actors in Belarus and the EU concerning the ways and methods of changes in Belarus;
- 3) Impulse for the development and consolidation of active public-political groups interested in the change of the current balance of forces (National Platform, Public Bologna Committee, and others);
- 4) In the long-term prospect, this strategy is able to lead to the formation of a wide public-political alternative to the existing authoritarianism;
- 5) Some advancement of reforms in the areas where there is a coincidence of the interest of the state; civil society will have levers of influence and possibilities of external influence on the process of reforms (for example, reforms of higher education and Belarus' joining the Bologna process).

**Costs** of this scenario:

- 1) High difficulty of its implementation. In the absence of samples, all participants of this process will have to invent new approaches to overcome the arising problems;

- 2) High load on the diplomatic process and negotiations between various stakeholders;
- 3) Resistance of the Belarusian state. The Belarusian authorities will continue to ignore the dialogue until they are compelled to join it under the coordinated pressure of the public and the European Union;
- 4) Postponement of the process of the direct implementation of large-scale modernization reforms.

**Implementation** conditions:

- 1) The EU has to admit concrete Belarusian public-political groups as parties of the EDM;
- 2) Ability of leaders of public-political groups to compromise and coordinate strategies of actions.

**Risks:**

- 1) Postponement of the necessary reforms brings Belarus' economy more and more risks and makes it more dependent on external forces (first of all, on Russia).
- 2) Big weight of the subjective factor. The high requirements — reflexivity, ability to conclude treaties, responsibility of participants of the EDM — cannot always be fulfilled.

This way of the development of the European Dialogue on Modernization is more technically difficult; it requires bigger use of intellectual resources and efforts of all its participants; its results are less predicted. Certainly, it looks less reliable, less specific, and it demands more resources than the way of authoritarian modernization. It is possible to choose it, but this possibility arises only if there is a strong orientation to walk the way of democratic changes in Belarus, even understanding all complexities of this path. Only being based on the axiological and ethical frameworks in which the price of the preservation and prolongation of the life of authoritarianism is too high, it is possible to choose the conventional way of modernization. If there is another choice, the degradation of politics, public life, science, and education will undermine the basic grounds of long-term development without which the future of Belarus is impossible.

## VI. Ways and directions of increasing the efficiency of the EDM

Due to the described above axiological guidelines (keynotes) and orientation on the strategy of widening civil society's participation in political decision-making, we are focused on the conventional way of modernization. Its implementation will have to direct efforts to create conditions for the coordination of positions of various subjects of the dialogue. The European Dialogue on Modernization should spur the strengthening of centripetal and unifying tendencies in Belarusian society both at the level of leading public-political forces and among ordinary citizens. The top-priority steps on the way of increasing the efficiency of the EDM should be made in the direction of intensifying various public stakeholders' involvement in the dialogue process. For this purpose, it is required:

- 1. At the level of the leaders of the EU member states**, it is necessary to fix publicly the position concerning the conventional way of the development of the European Dialogue on Modernization. In particular, it is necessary to underline the constant presence of all interested parties in the EDM — the European Union, Belarusian state, political opposition, and civil society, as well as to voice the European Union's adherence to the basic keynotes: the democratic and European way of transformations. In many respects, it will make it possible to eliminate the speculations concerning the EU's unconditional dialogue with the authoritarian regime.
- 2. At the level of the External Action Service and the European Commission**, it is necessary to organize wide public consultations with civil society of Belarus so as to evaluate the development of the European Dialogue on Modernization and the ways of its intensification. It can be done by publicly offering all interested organizations to express their positions concerning the questions of the development of the EDM, the role and participation of civil society, problems of getting the state involved, the role and possible contribution of the European Union. As a result of such consultations, a concept of the development of the European Dialogue on Modernization (together with the steering group) can be accepted;
- 3. At the level of the plan and strategy of the EDM development**, it is necessary to form two different-type spaces for communication of the involved subjects: it is necessary to add to the already available format of the expert working groups a new format for communication of political stakeholders of the EDM (parties, political movements, public associations). In particular, it can be made by including the key stakeholders in the structure of the EDM Steering Group;
- 4. At the level of expert work**, it is necessary to direct target financing to provide the program of working out modernization reforms, which includes thematic researches, monitorings, work of temporary expert collectives, public actions, training visits, and traineeship of experts. It is necessary to create on a contract basis some special temporary collectives of experts based on the qualification and professionalism principle. These collectives will be responsible for the preparation of detailed programs of reforms and for accompanying researches and monitorings.
- 5. At the level of popularization of the European Dialogue on Modernization** in Belarusian society, it is necessary to organize a wide media program. The media program can be organized as a special fund supporting the mass media for the creation of TV- and radio programs, special columns, media campaigns, series of special articles, publishing projects, etc. aimed at promoting the theme of the EDM. The media program will support the advancement in Belarusian society of the ideas of the European choice and European transformations, modernization and reforms, the EU's support to the modernization potential, and successful examples of transformations in the EU countries.

## The European Dialogue on Modernization with Belarusian society: the current status and development problems

Policy paper

Author: **Andrei Yahorau**

Editor and Proofreader: **Andrei Shutau**

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**Andrei Yahorau** is Director of the Centre for European transformation, Master of Political Science. He graduated from Belarusian State University, department of political science, and holds a master's degree in political science. He has been working in the political research area since 2001. The focus of research interests: transformation of the former Soviet Union space, civil society, political transformations in Belarus and the Eastern Partnership region, European studies.

**Center for European Transformation (CET)** is an Belarusian independent think-tank, founded in March 2010. CET is integrated into the International Consortium "EuroBelarus".



**Center for European Transformation**  
Minsk, Belarus

[cet@eurobelarus.info](mailto:cet@eurobelarus.info)

[cet.eurobelarus.info](http://cet.eurobelarus.info)

+375 29 6185388