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POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN BELARUS AND RUSSIA: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Политические и экономические отношения между Республикой Беларусь и Российской Федерацией: историческое развитие и перспективы на будущее

Relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus are a system-forming element of political and economic life in the post-Soviet space. The integration project of the Union State, unique in its depth and scale, has been defining the vector of development of Eastern Europe for more than two decades. In the context of global turbulence, Western sanctions pressure and the reformatting of international relations after 2022, the analysis of the state and prospects of Russian-Belarusian relations is of particular scientific and practical importance. Studying the synergies and contradictions within the framework of this union makes it possible to predict the further evolution of Eurasian integration and the balance of power in the region.

Historical background and formation of bilateral relations (1991–1999).

The USSR's collapse in 1991 resulted in the formation of two independent states. Initially, relations between Russia and Belarus were strained (1991–1994). In 1995, a Friendship and Cooperation Agreement and a Customs Union were signed. On April 2, 1996, the Community of Russia and Belarus was established to coordinate foreign policy

and form joint bodies, which became a Union in 1997. On December 8, 1999, the Treaty on the Union State was signed, outlining plans for a confederation with a single currency, citizenship, and legal space. Belarus's motives for integration included access to Russian energy resources at domestic prices and support for its unprofitable public sector. Russia aimed to strategically consolidate in the western direction and recreate the integration core in the post-Soviet space.

Speaking of the current state and issues of political integration, it should be noted that, overall, the Union State has a well-developed institutional structure, including the Supreme State Council (led by heads of State), the Council of Ministers (executive body), the Standing Committee (working body), and the Parliamentary Assembly (representative and consultative body). However, these institutions have limited power in practice. Key decisions are made at bilateral meetings of the Presidents, with the union bodies serving a largely technical and symbolic role. A major systemic contradiction is the lack of real supranational powers, particularly in budget and law.

Economic cooperation: structure, contradictions and trends.

Russia is Belarus' main trading partner. In 2021–2023, Russia's share in Belarus' trade turnover steadily exceeded 50 %. The structure of Belarusian exports to Russia is diversified: food, machine-building products (tractors, trucks), chemical products, furniture. Imports from Russia consist mainly of energy resources (oil and gas), metals and components. The impact of sanctions pressure and import substitution on bilateral economic ties The introduction of an unprecedented package of sanctions against Russia and Belarus in 2022 had a twofold impact on their economic relations.

Regarding positive consequences we can note a sharp increase in trade turnover, Belarus has become an important reexporter for the supply of sanctioned goods from the EU and Asia to Russia, deepening production cooperation, companies from the two countries are actively looking for replacements for Western suppliers as part of an import substitution policy, and integration of financial systems, transition to settlements in national currencies (up to 75 % in 2023), Belarus' connection to Russian financial messaging systems (SPFS). Mentioning some possible negative consequences, we can note logistics and transit issues through the Baltic States and Poland, and access problems to Western technologies and components for joint ventures.

Russia and Belarus's relationship has evolved from alliances to an asymmetrical, deeply integrated partnership. This journey involved complex negotiations, strategic adjustments, and interconnected dependencies. The result is a unique form of interstate cooperation that goes beyond traditional bilateral models.