

Chapter One

Belarus: A Pragmatic Approach toward Moldova

Vladislav V. Froltsov

Relations with the Republic of Moldova in the 1990s and 2000s exemplified the pragmatic orientation of modern Belarusian diplomacy. First of all, it focused on forming beneficial economic relations between Belarus and its foreign partners, with a focus on sustainable interaction. Political instability in Moldova, as well as its inter-ethnic contradictions and its difficult relationship with both Russia and Ukraine, were not an obstacle for the development of close bilateral relations. In this framework, both countries could achieve a mutually advantageous trade balance, as well as maintain their friendship against a background of differing and contradicting political processes within the Eastern European region.

During the preparation of this chapter, information and materials were used from the foreign affairs ministries of Belarus and Moldova, as well as the Embassy of Belarus in Chisinau. Finally, publications and some statistical data from the mass media were used. It should also be noted that in the early 2000s, there was significant research interest in the bilateral relationship between these two countries. From 1999 to 2009, a detailed article about the history and current cooperation was prepared by the Belarusian ambassador in Moldova, Vasiliy Sakovich. In 2010, it was published in a collected volume of research papers, *Moldoscopie (Probleme de analiză politică)* (Moldoscopy [Problems of political analysis]).¹ In December 2004, Andrey Yermolovich, counselor of the Belarusian embassy, delivered his PhD thesis “Belarusian-Moldovan Relations: The present situation and development trends (a political analysis)” at Moldovan State University. He managed to give a quite exhaustive picture of the early years of relations between Belarus and Moldova as independent states.²

In addition, the Belarusian Embassy in Chisinau regularly organized scientific-practical conferences devoted to various aspects of bilateral relations. Some researchers presented very interesting reports and publications considering historical aspects of communications between Belarusians and Moldovans. For example, the Belarusian historian Sergey Lashkevich described aspects of diplomatic relations between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Moldavian Principality from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries (at that time the modern Belarusian lands were part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania).³

Nevertheless, an analysis revealing the primary directions of Belarusian foreign policy toward Moldova, as well as a definition of Belarusian interests in Moldova and a history of their evolution during twenty years of the Belarusian-Moldovan interaction is still relevant. It would allow for the consideration of the most prominent aspects of bilateral cooperation and give a detailed forecast regarding their further development. Namely this paper seeks to trace:

- the establishment of political dialogue between Belarus and Moldova in the early 1990s, its evolution in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as well as its apparent crescendo from 2008 to 2010;
- notable features of foreign trade between the two countries;
- cooperation with Gagauzia within bilateral relations;
- cultural and humanitarian interaction;
- and perspectives on Belarusian-Moldovan relations.

It is also necessary to explain the considerable attention this chapter devotes to the development of economic relations between the two countries—in particular to the volume and structure of foreign trade. For post-Soviet republics, in which the economy is essentially supervised and coordinated by the state, the promotion of foreign trade is an extremely important, if not defining, feature of political interaction. As such, the expansion of export opportunities is one of the highest priority issues for modern Belarusian diplomacy. Trade opportunities largely determine the significance of different countries and regions for Belarus.

Finally, it is important to mention the position of the Republic of Belarus concerning the self-proclaimed and internationally unrecognized Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic. Throughout twenty years of political interaction, Transnistria was not put on the agenda by the Belarusian government, out of respect for the territorial integrity of Moldova. One example of this approach was a situation in October 2006, when the so-called parliament of Transnistria addressed a request to the legislatures of Belarus and Ukraine to recognize its independence. In reply, Head of the Standing Committee of the House of Representatives of Belarus for International Affairs and Ties with the Commonwealth of Independent States Vadim Popov emphasized that his country recognizes the territorial integrity of Moldova, part of which is Transnistria. Therefore Belarus maintains diplomatic relations with Moldova, and the question of PMR recognition has been shelved.⁴

The Political Dialogue

Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on November 19, 1992. The Embassy of Moldova started its work in Minsk in 1993. The Moldovan Ambassador in the Republic of Belarus simultaneously represents his country in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The Belarusian Embassy was opened

in Chisinau two years later. First Ambassador of the Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Moldova Nikolay Grinev officially started his duties in May 1995.⁵

The signing the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Moldova in 1992 was also important for the development of bilateral cooperation. It entered into force in August of 1994 and formed the basis of the further Belarusian-Moldovan relations.

President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko visited Moldova in September 1995. During this official visit, both countries defined the main directions of their cooperation. The basis for sustainable interaction at the highest political level between Belarus and Moldova was established. In 1999, Vasily Sakovich was appointed Belarusian ambassador to Moldova. He was head of the diplomatic mission for the next ten years. Earlier Sakovich headed the (financial) Control Chamber of Belarus and was a Member of Parliament.

An official visit of Moldovan President Petru Lucinschi to Belarus took place in June 2000. The countries signed twelve agreements and international treaties, and accepted a long-term program of economic cooperation between Belarus and Moldova for a period of ten years.⁶

In late August 2001, Moldovan Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev made an official visit to Belarus. In December 2001, Moldovan Parliamentary Chairman Eugenia Ostapciuc officially visited Belarus. In January 2003, Belarusian Chairman of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly Alexander Voytovich, made an official visit to Moldova. During his visit to Moldova, a Cooperation Agreement between the parliaments of both countries was signed. In October 2005, a working visit of Moldovan Prime Minister Tarlev to Belarus took place.⁷

In the second half of the 2000s, the intensity of bilateral contact in the political sphere decreased. The only activity was an exchange of parliamentary delegations. In June 2006, Alexander Sayko, head of the Working Group on Cooperation with the Moldovan Parliament, led Belarusian parliamentary delegation to Moldova. During this visit there were a few meetings between the Belarusian Parliamentarians and Chairman of the Moldovan Parliament Marian Lupu, Chairman of the Moldovan Parliamentary Friendship Group with Belarus Iurie Eriomin, and other Moldovan MPs and representatives of the executive branch. In November 2006, Eriomin, head of the Friendship Group with the National Assembly of Belarus, and committeeman on Agriculture and Food Industry of the Moldovan Parliament, led a Moldovan Parliamentary delegation to Belarus.⁸

The Foreign Trade*

Against the background of declining intensity of bilateral political contacts in the late 2000s, interaction in the economic sphere blossomed. While commodity circulation between the two countries failed to exceed \$110 million in the 1990s

* Belarusian statistics include indicators for all Moldova (including Transnistria).

and early 2000s, steady growth was observed from 2004 to 2009. It is visible in table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Commodity circulation between Belarus and Moldova from 2003–2010

Year	Volume, in mil. USD	Growth, in %
2003	104.0	—
2004	142.2	36.7
2005	174.5	22.9
2006	176.7	1.3
2007	226.5	28.2
2008	334.9	47.7
2009	255.0	-23.6
2010	249.2	-2.0

Source: Posol'stvo Respubliki Belarus' v Respublike Moldova, "Torgovo-ekonomicheskoye sotrudnichestvo," <http://www.moldova.belembassy.org/rus/belmol/ecsotr/> (accessed March 24, 2011).

Therefore, it is quite important to analyze the correlation between export and import within the framework of the Belarusian-Moldovan commodity circulation, which explains its fundamental growth between 2007 and 2008, and its fall from 2009 to 2010. Until 2007 the volume of Belarusian exports to Moldova and Moldovan exports to Belarus were, as a rule, comparable. A negligible excess of Belarusian exports existed due to the character of bilateral foreign trade exchange. From Belarus to Moldova, hi-tech goods were delivered: tractors and motor vehicles for the transport of goods, parts and accessories, road and building equipment, tires, refrigerators and deep-freezers etc. From Moldova came fruits, vegetables, and other agricultural products, including wine.⁹ About a quarter of all Moldovan wine exports went to Belarus.¹⁰ The difference in market prices for these kinds of goods predetermined a positive trade balance in favor of Belarus. Since 2007 the situation changed considerably. It is visible in table 1.2.

Thus, in 2007 Belarusian exports increased by 51.1 percent, and in 2008—by 1.7 times. But in 2009 its volume decreased almost by a quarter, and in 2010—it fell to 2 percent. The official Web site of the Belarusian Embassy in Chisinau explained this decline in exports to Moldova by the negative influence of the world financial and economic crisis on the dynamics of bilateral trading and economic relations worldwide.¹¹ Nevertheless, these circumstances did not prevent Moldovan agricultural producers from maintaining exports into Belarus at the pre-crisis level.

Table 1.2. Export and import volumes in Belarusian trade with Moldova from 2005–2010

Year	Export to Moldova, in mil. USD	Import from Moldova, in mil. USD
2005	102.2	72.3
2006	95.7	81.0
2007	144.6	81.9
2008	242.2	92.7
2009	170.4	84.6
2010	165.3	83.9

Source: Posol'stvo Respubliki Belarus' v Respublike Moldova, "Torgovo-ekonomicheskoye sotrudnichestvo."

It is important to consider the commodity structure of Belarusian exports to Moldova. Within the framework of this analysis, it is necessary to pay special attention to the sensitivity of the total cost of Belarusian exports from the cost of oil products (petroleum oils, other than crude) supplied to Moldova.

This interdependence is illustrated in table 1.3.

Table 1.3. Petroleum oils, other than crude, exported to Moldova and their share in the total cost of the Belarusian exports to the country from 2005–2010

Year	Whole export, in mil. USD	Share of oil products in the whole export cost, in mil. USD and in %
2005	102.2	50.1 mil. (49.0%)
2006	95.7	39.4 mil. (41.2%)
2007	144.6	73.7 mil. (51.0%)
2008	242.2	155.0 mil. (64.0%)
2009	170.4	108.7 mil. (64.0%)
2010	165.3	93.0 mil. (57.3%)

Source: Posol'stvo Respubliki Belarus' v Respublike Moldova, "Torgovo-ekonomicheskoye sotrudnichestvo;" National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, *Foreign trade of the Republic of Belarus. Statistical book* (Minsk: National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2010), 126, <http://belstat.gov.by/homep/ru/publications/fttrade/2010/main.php> (accessed March 31, 2011).

Note: Figures include petroleum bitumen and coke, with the exception of 2010.

Having increased the delivery of oil products from 2007 to 2008, the Belarusian side managed to achieve a total increase of total exports to Moldova. This commodity group brought Belarus almost two-thirds of income from trade with Moldova. However, the falling prices for production also led to a reduction in total cost of Belarusian exports from 2009 to 2010, as well as to a total decrease of commodity circulation between the two republics.

As declared on the official Web site of the Belarusian Embassy in Chisinau, a commodity circulation decrease in 2010 was connected to the reduction of oil product deliveries from Belarus at 12.9 percent.¹² Besides the falling cost of oil and petroleum products throughout world and regional markets, a negative influence on exports of this kind could also be caused by a change in favorable conditions of purchase of Russian oil for Belarusian oil refineries. Because of this variable, it is quite difficult to predict the final volume and structure of foreign trade turnover between the two countries in 2011, as the dynamics of Belarusian exports depend on some external factors. Moldovan imports to Belarus will likely remain at their former level, considering the real demand for Moldovan agricultural products in the Belarusian market.

The Belarusian government also promoted an export increase of agricultural commodities from Moldova that could not be produced in Belarus. As Vasiliy Sakovich pointed out, special decrees from the president of Belarus were published on the creation of favorable conditions for the delivery of Moldovan fresh fruit and vegetable products, and on the stimulation of Moldovan still and sparkling wine sales within the Belarusian market. As a result, from 1999 to 2002, the commodity circulation doubled.¹³

Cooperation with Gagauzia

In its promotion of Belarusian products in Moldovan markets, the Embassy of Belarus did not exclude the Gagauzian autonomy. In February 2007, Vasiliy Sakovich visited Comrat. A local newspaper, *Yedinaya Gagauziya*, characterized the arrival of the Ambassador as “a visit of the head of the Belarusian Manufacturers’ Delegation,” thus underlining the importance of the meeting of the head of the Belarusian diplomatic mission with the Chairman of the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia Stepan Esir and *Bashkan* (or *head*) Mihail Formuzal. In turn, the *Bashkan* characterized the visit of the ambassador as “an important meeting of friends.” He also recalled the Cooperation Agreement between the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (Gagauz Yeri) and the Mogilev Regional Executive Committee of Belarus signed in 2000.¹⁴

In his address, Sakovich noted a success not only in bilateral cooperation, but also listed a number of problems that Belarusian enterprises faced in Moldova. The ambassador expressed concern regarding the reconstruction of the Chisinau tractor factory, Tracom, where a joint release of tractors was planned. It also involved the joint release of trolley buses. On the eve of Sakovich’s visit to

Gagauzia, an Agreement of Intent to this effect was signed in Chisinau. In early February 2006 the implementation of this manufacturing project was coordinated with the Moldovan Minister of Industry and Trade Vladimir Antosii.¹⁵

In response, Formuzal promised to study and adopt Belarusian experience in agriculture. It was decided to open a trading house of Belarus in Comrat, and a Gagauzian trading house in Belarus.

The Russian information agency *Regnum*, which specializes in post-Soviet issues, quoted *Yedinaya Gagauziya*. The newspaper reported the questions discussed by Gagauzian businessmen and representatives of Belarusian enterprises. The inability to serve as dealers of Belarusian products was a problem for Gagauzians, as many such contracts are signed with firms in Chisinau. In turn, the visiting Belarusians pointed out that it was difficult to organize purchases of Gagauzian wine products, although Russia—the biggest market for wine from Moldova—had refused its import. *Yedinaya Gagauziya* blamed Chisinau, as the government of Moldova prohibited the export of wine-making materials (considered raw materials), in an effort to support the manufacture of finished products such as wine in Moldova.¹⁶

Cultural and Humanitarian Bilateral Interaction

Besides economic relations, the Belarusian Embassy in Chisinau paid much attention to interaction with representatives of the Belarusian diaspora in Moldova, numbering approximately 20,000 at the declaration of Moldovan independence. When the new independent state of Moldova was declared, Belarusians established their own cultural organizations. In 1992, the first Belarusian association was created in Chisinau. In 2004, the first Congress of Belarusians in Moldova took place, in which representatives of the various organizations participated.¹⁷

As Vasilii Sakovich noted, on the whole, Belarusian-Moldovan relations in the economic, scientific, and cultural spheres have an active and mutually advantageous character. As a fundament for successful economic cooperation, he cited the complementary rather than competitive nature of the national economies, the geographical proximity of the countries, and the bilateral flow of goods. In the areas of science, culture, and education, a good fellowship between peoples had formed during the Soviet period, and it especially in the interest of both states to preserve and develop cooperation along these lines.¹⁸

At the same time, Sakovich ascertained a less than favorable trend developing in the framework of Belarusian-Moldovan political relations. Namely, the prolonged pause in the exchange of top-level officials since October 2005.¹⁹

Dialogue Activation in 2008–2010

Nevertheless, the situation started to change by mid-2008, as Belarus began to dialogue with the EU. In late May, Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski

announced the Eastern Partnership program with the support of Sweden. Both Belarus and Moldova were invited to take part in it. The presence of new common interests stimulated an increase in bilateral interaction at the political level.

In early June of 2008, the Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin officially visited the Republic of Belarus. During his visit, several aspects of bilateral cooperation were discussed.²⁰ In November 2008, the heads of the two countries' governments, Sergey Sidorskiy and Zinaida Greceanîi, took part in the opening of a new Belarusian Embassy building in Chisinau. During the celebrations, both prime ministers stated the presence of a mutual interest in strengthening bilateral communications. Belarusian Ambassador Vasiliy Sakovich paid special attention to the considerable success in the development of economic cooperation. From 1998 to 2008, commodity circulation between the two countries grew six fold. Belarusian exports to Moldova increased in eight times over during the same period.²¹ Bilateral meetings of the prime ministers were also held in May of 2008 and 2009 during two meetings of the Summit of the Heads of the CIS governments. Some questions of economic cooperation were discussed there. In November 2008, the Belarusian Chairmen of the Council of Republic, Boris Batura, and the House of Representatives of the National Assembly, Vladimir Andreychenko, met with the Chairman of the Moldovan Parliament Marian Lupu, during the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS in St. Petersburg.²²

The new ambassador of Belarus in Moldova, Vyacheslav Osipenko, presented his credentials to the Moldovan Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Andrei Stratan on July 9, 2009. During this meeting they discussed the expansion of Belarusian-Moldovan cooperation in the economic sphere as well as attracting Belarusian investments to the Moldovan economy.²³ Before his appointment as the ambassador in Moldova, Osipenko held the position of deputy chief of the Division for Foreign Economic Activity Coordination and director of the Department for Foreign Economic Activity in the Belarusian Foreign Ministry.²⁴ A changing of the ambassador to Belarus occurred three months after the parliamentary elections in Moldova, which had resulted in the formal victory of the ruling Communist party, but also in a strengthening of the liberal and democratic parties. Sending Chisinau such a highly professional Belarusian diplomat, with experience in the spheres of foreign trade policy coordination, confirmed the basic priorities of the Belarusian policy toward Moldova, namely the enlargements of exports, mutually advantageous trade and further political dialogue.

This approach did not significantly shift after the change in Moldova's government in September 2009. Interaction at the highest political level proceeded. It may even be said that the dialogue became considerably more active after the so-called pro-European coalition came to power in Chisinau. This trend was largely due to the striving of both countries to take part in the ambitious EU Eastern Partnership program.

In October 2009, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko made a working visit to the Republic of Moldova to participate in a session of the Coun-

cil of Heads of CIS States. During this visit, the Belarusian President held a bilateral meeting with the Acting President of Moldova and Chairman of Parliament Mihai Ghimpu. In March 2010, another working meeting between the President of Belarus and the Acting President of Moldova took place in Kiev. In July 2010, a meeting of the Belarusian Chairman of the Council of Republic of the National Assembly Anatoliy Rubinov with Acting President Ghimpu was held during the World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments in Geneva.²⁵ By August 2010, some ninety-seven agreements were concluded between the two countries, sixty of which entered into force.²⁶

Following the results of the presidential election in Belarus in December 2010, the Moldovan Foreign Ministry issued a statement urging the Belarusian government to continue the democratic reforms necessary to bring its electoral process into accordance with international standards.²⁷ There were no statements from top officials in Moldova. In early April 2011, Minsk was visited by a delegation of Moldovan MPs, led by Chairman of the Commission of Foreign Policy and European Integration, and Vice-President of the Democratic Party of Moldova Igor Corman. He underlined that Belarus is an important trade and economic partner for Moldova, and is seventh among economic partners in volume of commodity circulation. He expressed confidence in continuing effective dialogue between the two countries and their parliaments.²⁸

All of these facts testified to the aspirations of the leadership of Chisinau's new ruling coalition to continue dialogue with Minsk along the same mutually advantageous lines. Belarus' unchanged support for the territorial integrity of Moldova also promoted further dialogue between the two countries, and an increase in high-level political exchanges in the late 2000s.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed Belarusian policy toward Moldova in several stages. Each stage was characterized by a certain change in the vision of Moldova's role in Belarusian foreign policy interests and priorities.

It is possible to distinguish the following stages:

- *1992–1995*—establishment of diplomatic relations and the maintenance of existing communications in place since the Soviet period. Chronologically: the establishment of diplomatic relations in November 1992, an official visit of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko to Moldova in September 1995;
- *1995–2005*—an increase in political interaction arrives against the background of the sustainable development of economic cooperation. The end of this stage could be marked October 2005, when Moldovan Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev visited Belarus. By the mid-2000s, a po-

litical and legal base for the interaction of two countries had been formed, steady commercial relations were established;

- *2005–2008*—a period of low intensity in political contact (as former Belarusian Ambassador Vasiliy Sakovich noted) arrives against the background of a considerable increase in Belarusian exports to Moldova, due to an increase in the share and cost of oil products. This boosts Belarusian exports to Moldova by 2.5 times;
- *2008–2010*—a renewal of the active political dialogue occurs, especially after the liberal and democratic coalition comes to power in Chisinau, which is interested in interaction with Belarus within the framework of cooperation with the EU and the realization of the Eastern Partnership program. An increase of political dialogue between the two countries was not prevented by falling trade turnover, after Russia changed its delivery terms of oil to Belarus.
- *2010*—at present, relations are largely defined by the EU's policy toward Belarus. This factor will certainly be considered by the current Moldovan government, which aspires to the closest possible integration with the European Union. In turn, trade between the two countries also depends on external factors, taking into account the dominating proportion of oil products made from Russian petroleum supplies in the structure of Belarusian exports to Moldova.

Analyzing Belarusian policy within the framework of these stages allows us to distinguish the following groupings of Belarusian interests toward Moldova, ranked according to their importance:

- Economic and foreign trade interests. First of all, increasing Belarusian exports to Moldova. The Republic of Belarus is interested in expanding its share of high-technology product export to Moldova (motor vehicles, machinery, and mechanical appliances, etc.), as well as including placing their manufacture within Moldovan territory. This takes into account the difficulty of predicting the future situation of oil products.
- Interest in political dialogue. Friendly relations with top officials in Chisinau, regardless of their political views, allow Belarus to strengthen its position within the framework of interaction with both Russia and the EU. Therefore, the very sensitive issue of Transnistria (for every government in Chisinau), is not mentioned in Belarusian-Moldovan political interactions in any regard. This is in contrast to the relations of Moldova with Russia and Ukraine.
- Cultural and humanitarian interests, including the support of the small Belarusian diaspora in Moldova, and the even smaller Moldovan diaspora in Belarus. Informal communications and contacts left over from the Soviet period played a considerable role in this regard. It was necessary only to assist this cooperation at the state level.

It is possible to assume in conclusion that despite some external factors, Belarusian-Moldovan cooperation will safely continue its present course and priorities, placing importance on political dialogue, the development of foreign trade, and the extension of commodity markets for both countries.

For the Republic of Belarus, maintaining friendly relations with any government in Chisinau will be as important as it was during the past twenty years of interaction with the various political forces of the country. The markets of Moldova, small as they may be, nevertheless provide annual income totaling some hundreds of millions of dollars for Belarusian industry, which is important under conditions of increasing economic competition in the post-Soviet territory.

For the Republic of Moldova, Belarus remains a solid partner that does not try to interfere with its internal affairs, and provides a market for Moldovan agricultural products. These constants will be taken into account by any future government of Moldova—regardless of its foreign policy preferences.

Notes

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11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Sakovich, "Belorussko-moldavskiye otnosheniya," 160.
14. "Komrat-Minsk: 'Gotovy razvivat' sotrudnichestvo...' Gagauziya za nedelyu," *IA REGNUM Novosti*, February 23, 2007, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/787013.html> (accessed March 23, 2011).
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