

**Statement by Foreign Minister of Belarus V.Makei at the video-conference of the Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers' meeting (11 June 2020, 15.00 – 17.30)**

Dear High Representative, colleagues

It is great that we can continue working on the Eastern Partnership future despite the COVID pandemic. The crisis took a heavy toll on EU and EaP countries, and Belarus mourns the loss of numerous lives.

The pandemic became a 'stress test' for our societies and economies. We fully share the Commission's assessment that resilience should be the overriding goal of the Eastern Partnership. Health care and human security in general are key to avoiding new tragedies.

In Belarus, we have managed to minimize fatalities and keep the economy running. We firmly believe that people have the essential right to earn their living while the Government's duty is to keep them safe. And as life gradually returns to normalcy across Europe, we are to come out of this challenge stronger together.

The Government of Belarus prepared a support package for most affected sectors employing over half a million people.

We highly appreciate the assistance offered to us by our partners in the European Union and individual EU member states.

We look forward to the **first delivery of medical supplies** from the EU and deployment of other assistance instruments, including through the EBRD and EIB.

Let me hope that **Belarus will be also eligible for the EU macro-financial assistance** once the IMF deal is done.

Resilience also means **more trade, investment and market access**. Belarus counts on the EU support in Belarus' WTO accession process. It is also essential that **export certification of our food products resumes** as soon as possible, free from unrelated conditionality.

**Climate action and green economy** are important priorities for us. At the same time we should avoid that the European Green Deal creates trade obstacles or pushes the Partners' companies out of the EU market. **Projects that help replace oil and gas with electricity should be encouraged**. With the nuclear power plant in Ostrovets to be commissioned soon, Belarus expands the use of electricity in various sectors, like e-mobility, while sticking to the highest security and safety standards, and remains fully transparent in its nuclear programme.

By the way, I must say that we are ready to cooperate with the European institutions in an open and transparent way.

**Technological innovation** deserves to be mainstreamed in all EaP cooperation areas. Belarus circulated a few days ago its proposal to establish **an**

**Eastern Partnership IT-School in Minsk** to boost digital skills of the youth in the Partners States. I would hope that you could support our proposal.

**Energy and transport connectivity** are essential for the Partners' security. We look forward to progress of the TEN-T investment action plan. **A similar one is necessary for energy connectivity projects. It would expand the Partners' access to reliable sources of oil and gas and help diversify their energy supply routes.**

For Belarus, one of the tangible EaP deliverables in the past decade is finalizing visa facilitation and readmission agreements to become operational as of 1<sup>st</sup> July. Now, we are looking forward to productive talks with the EU on a customs agreement and starting negotiations on **a Belarus – EU framework agreement** as the next logical steps.

Belarus remains committed to vision of the Eastern Partnership as a non-confrontational project aimed at creating an area of peace, stability and prosperity in our region. An Eastern Partnership that responds to individual needs and ambitions of each of the Partners while motivating them to work together. An Eastern Partnership that is close to the people and brings tangible results. We are ready to further contribute to making this future a reality.

Thank you.