

Выступление
Министра иностранных дел В.В.Макея
на открытии белорусского-швейцарского
бизнес-форума «Doing Business in Belarus»
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Dear guests,

Let me sincerely welcome you at this event dedicated to business opportunities and investment climate in Belarus.

The first part of my statement will be quite traditional for such forums. I would start saying that I am confident that Belarus is the best place for your investments.

While trying to convince you of this, I will anticipate many speakers from Belarus by giving to you some information which might be important when you decide to develop your contacts with Belarusian companies.

In the second part of my statement, which perhaps is not quite common for such audiences, I would like to address you as the most active representatives of your communities, firmly committed to the development of your country, region, and Europe. Here in Geneva, we cannot bypass the issues of multilateralism, sustainable development and their interdependence with international peace and security.

Before passing to concrete success stories of Swiss companies in Belarus I must first mention that Switzerland is an important trade and economic partner for Belarus. Switzerland consistently ranks among the leading foreign direct investors to the Belarusian economy. Our trade in goods is also growing steadily. Last year it reached 187 million USD and increased by more than 17%. Our trade in services is even more impressive: in 2018 it has reached almost 270 million USD.

Among investment projects which are of proud for Belarus and Switzerland, the true shining star is “Stadler Minsk” Plant. The Plant was officially opened on 20 November 2014. The company is part of the “Stadler Rail Group”, a Swiss company that has been one of the leading European manufacturers of railway rolling stock for more than 75 years.

Another important project is carried out by “Franck Muller” at the Minsk Watch Plant. I am confident that it will be fully implemented in the foreseeable future. This company is hosting today’s event and I would like to express our sincere gratitude for their hospitality.

Apart from these solid examples, one may recollect the most recent case when Swiss “Sika” acquired in March 2019 the Belarusian company “BelINEKO”, which is a producer of chemical products for constructions.

Of course these are not the only examples. In total, 118 enterprises with Swiss capital are registered in Belarus. It proves that foreign investment and technology can bear fruit on Belarusian soil.

These true stories of success speak for themselves. The conditions which Belarus has created for foreign investors meet even such high standards as are requested by Swiss companies. Belarusian goods are in demand in Switzerland, while Swiss goods are popular in Belarus.

Of course, we still have lot of space for improvement.

With this understanding, the Government of Belarus systematically improves all types of infrastructural and related services. The Government has learnt to hear foreign partners.

We have restricted bureaucracy and administrative procedures to minimum. Our economic, banking, trade and other related legislation is stable, predictable and codified. You need an example from IT-sector? I will tell you that our legislation on blockchain technology is the most advanced in the world. An example from a more down-to-earth sphere? It is difficult to find a place in the whole world where it is easier to register your property than in Belarus. We hold the fifth place in that category according to Doing Business 2018 Report.

Belarus is at the final stage of negotiations on accession to the World Trade Organization. We are sure that this will open up new opportunities for doing business “in” and “with” Belarus, as well as will give additional guarantees directly to you.

National Agency for Investment and Privatization of Belarus is a guide and assistant for you. It meets the investor by the hand and accompanies them through all the procedures, up to, if necessary, signing the contract.

As a transit country, Belarus has one of the best road and rail networks in the region. We have plenty of warehouses and loading terminals. Belarus has direct flights to almost all European capitals. Since 2013, there has been a direct flight between Minsk and Geneva three times a week.

We allow visa-free entry for air passengers from more than 100 countries for a period of up to 1 month. In the future such conditions may also be extended for those traveling by land.

Belarus has one of the best Internet coverage in the region in terms of its availability, speed and quality.

The national education system and the support provided to young people ensure the high-quality training for both specialists with higher education and specialists of working professions.

Foreign families feel comfortable in Belarus, like if they were at home. We have friendly and safe cities. Education and health issues are easily solved. The level of healthcare, in terms of its availability and price-quality ratio, is comparable with the one in OECD countries.

Let's now add to all these conditions such macroeconomic preferences as:

- free access to the market of Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union;
- free trade zone with Ukraine and other CIS countries, Vietnam, Serbia and soon with Iran;
- preferential conditions for investors in the FEZs, in small towns of Belarus;
- and exceptional conditions for producers of goods in the Belarusian-Chinese industrial park.

One should not forget the army of high-class Belarusian programmers, who, having started with computer games, including the famous World of Tanks, have

actually created a new sector of economy with billions in terms of exports. They are ready to provide your business with necessary program solutions at competitive prices and without leaving the capital's boundaries.

Of course, Belarus is ready to welcome investors bringing new high value-added products and services to the country, with an emphasis on innovations and high-tech.

At the same time, we remain firmly committed to the idea of strengthening the country's industrial potential. We are ready to consider concrete proposals on cooperation, joint ventures and even on privatization of enterprises of traditional sectors of Belarusian economy, including, for example, engineering, petrochemistry, food industry, etc.

In terms of working with investors, we have no geographical or political preferences, because, as you know, economic interests predetermine our foreign policy principles.

I want to assure you that we do not make friends with somebody against someone. On the contrary, we aim to be friends with all our neighbors and equally with more distant countries.

Historically Belarus has been placed between the world's key players, on the border between two economic unions. It is of our vital strategic interests to create single economic space with free movement of goods, services, people and capital from Lisbon to Vladivostok, or even from Vancouver to Vancouver. This is a guarantee of peace and stability for Belarusians and for all the people of Europe.

That is why we oppose politically motivated economic restrictions (especially unilateral sanctions) in international trade. We oppose restrictions on legal transfer of technology. We oppose creation of new dividing lines in Europe, including between the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Given the economic background, we are deeply convinced that there is an urgent need for direct dialogue between regional economic integrations in order to remove economic barriers and to promote business contacts.

Belarus calls for establishment of substantive cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union. I am sure that there is large space for developing cooperation in such areas as standardization, veterinary and phytosanitary control, government procurement, etc.

President of Belarus called this approach “integration of integrations”. The current President of Germany once called it “greater connectivity” in Europe.

I am convinced that each businessman and investor should support the essence of this concept, no matter how it is called.

We expect that political understanding of importance of its practical implementation will first come directly from you, representatives of Swiss, European and transnational businesses. No government in the modern world can ignore the interests of its business elite and business community. We should promote this idea together in a consistent and straightforward manner.

In this context, I would like to stress the important role of Belarusian honorary consuls, who often combine business and politics, in promoting the concept of “integration of integrations”.

Dear honorary consuls of Belarus in Lausanne, Zurich, Lyon and Biarritz, by being present here today, you confirm your strong focus on promoting the whole set of bilateral relations between our countries including economic cooperation. Dear guests, the Belarusian honorary consuls are another operative tool at your disposal.

I would like to express my special gratitude to Dr. Dorit Sallis, Managing Director of the Switzerland-CIS Joint Chamber of Commerce, for your help in organizing our meeting here in Geneva and for signing today the Cooperation Agreements with Belarusian National Agency on Investment and Privatization and National Center of Marketing under my Ministry.

I wish you success in your work. May this evening be full of valuable business contacts.

Thank you for attention.