

## 5<sup>th</sup> BELARUS REALITY CHECK

May 19, 2015

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia  
K. Valdemara Street 3, Riga

### PROGRAMME

The Eastern Partnership Reality Check is a policy review process aiming to gather insights from top domestic and international analysts, practitioners, diplomats and policy-makers covering Eastern Partnership countries in order to discuss these behind closed doors. It has the ambition to satisfy demand for a more in-depth policy in this area. Under the aegis of Lithuania's EU Presidency (July-December 2013) the first such a review was the Belarus Reality Check (BRC) enacted in Vilnius, Lithuania October 2012. The Reality Checks are now held under the aegis of the Latvia's EU Presidency (January-June 2015).

The 5th Belarus Reality Check to be held in Riga, Latvia is comprised of top Belarusian and international analysts, observers and practitioners to achieve evidence and ground based analysis as well as balanced policy advice. Speakers are providing inputs but active participation is expected from all invited participants. Published non-papers are product of the meetings, fact-checking and peer review process.

#### 09.30 – 10.00 **REGISTRATION & MORNING COFFEE**

#### 10.00 – 10.15 **OPENING**

Andrejs Pildegovičs, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia  
Maira Mora, Ambassador, Head of EU Delegation to Belarus  
Balázs Jarábik, Visiting Scholar, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace & Associate Fellow, Central European Policy Institute  
Jan Widberg, Director, The Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia

#### 10.15 – 12.15 **UKRAINE CRISIS: HOW THE BELARUS-RUSSIA RELATIONS CHANGING**

The Ukraine crisis seems a game changer for Belarus: Minsk hosted the ceasefire talks and is trying to balance between Russia and the West. While European leaders and EU officials are regular guests in Belarus' capital, Russia is watching this process with a more careful eye. The "we lost Belarus" choir is getting stronger, although this is more coming from "civil society" circles than from the Kremlin. At the same time Minsk, gearing up for the November 2015 presidential elections is also getting more nervous about Russia's potential reaction. The panel will focus on Belarus - Russia economic, social (Russia's soft power including media and other mechanisms), political as well as security ties after the Minsk agreements and before Belarus's presidential elections. Both Moscow's and Minsk's perspectives will be discussed including how Moscow views Minsk's balancing and the warming up of relations with the West.



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12.15 – 13.15 **LUNCH**

13.15 – 15.00 **AFTER RIGA SUMMIT: HOW TO MANAGE THE WARMING RELATIONS BETWEEN BELARUS AND THE WEST**

Relations between the EU and Belarus has been warming up, while the Ukraine crisis can be called as a breakthrough – not because Belarus`s internal development would have prompted such a change in relations but mostly due to the Ukraine crisis the EU had a different regional context. In this changing geopolitical context Belarus`s state capacity – the last country to control its territorial integrity among the Eastern Partnership countries – has been valued more. The Latvian EU presidency was also moving to embrace the engagement with those Eastern Partnership countries - mostly Armenia and Belarus – who are also taking part in the competitive Eurasian Union. At the same time there is no quick embrace and therefore expectations as during the dialogue in 2009-2010 results into nothing more but a “slow dance” in order to build up contacts and relations while most of the EU`s restrictive measures are in place. The panel will take stock of the relations since the 2013 Vilnius Summit both from the viewpoint of the EU and Minsk, measure the impact of Ukraine crisis on the relations and outline as concrete roadmap as possible for after the Riga Summit.

15.00 – 15.30 **COFFEE BREAK**

15.30 – 17.15 **ECONOMY IN ELECTIONS` YEAR**

The big elephant in the room is the economy, what is mostly due to the slowdown of Russian market, is performing – first time in an elections year - much under expectations. Although, Moscow recently approved a RUB 6.2 billion credit for Belarus, Russian subsidies have a decreasing tendencies along with market performance. This credit as well as a new agreement with China over USD 1 billion should help the Belarusian government to move the economy through the elections period. However, Moscow is dissatisfied with Minsk`s lack of compliance with agreements to privatize its key industries. Despite shrinking resources Minsk wants to keep the control of state over the economy and the private sector, which is gaining a greater role and bigger influence. Such traditional approach is hindering an otherwise on-going internal debate on structural reforms - the recommendation of the IMF and general expectations of the West – but it is unlikely that Minsk in the current geopolitical situation would be willing to proceed with liberalization. The panel will bring data about the economic situation of the Belarusian economy, will shed light on the role of private sector, the role of international organizations in the reform process, general expectations of reforms as well as discuss the role of economy in preparation towards the presidential elections.

18.00 **DINNER**