

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

February 25, 2016

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania  
J. Tumo-Vaizganto g. 2, Vilnius

### 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 on October 2012.

After gatherings in Warsaw (May 2013), Brussels (April 2014), and Riga, held under the aegis of Latvia's EU Presidency (January-June 2015), the 6th Belarus Reality Check returns to Vilnius. After the presidential elections with relative political stability at home Belarus faces its biggest economic crisis in a very volatile region.

The meeting is to be 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**

Andrius Krivas, Vice-Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania  
Balázs Jarábik, Visiting Scholar, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace & Associate Fellow, Central European Policy Institute  
Laurynas Kasčiūnas, Acting Director, Eastern Europe Studies Centre

#### 10.15 – 12.00 **BELARUS' ECONOMY AND THE PROCESSES OF REFORMS**

Due to the global slow down and particularly the economic challenges of its major trading partners Russia and Ukraine, Belarus faces its biggest economic crisis. No wonder that reform expectations have been high on the agenda, especially as Minsk is negotiating with the IMF for a loan in exchange of structural reforms. Already last year, however, has become clear that potential reforms in Belarus will be much less connected to the actual state of the economy but on political will of its leadership as well as external relations. Although the government has prepared a technical plan of reforms, President Alexander Lukashenka several times said no to structural reforms publically.



This session will be dealing with the state of the economy, the potential of reforms, the social and political dimension in society as well as some of the external relations and how much political will actually exists and how to generate more by external and domestic actors.

*Moderator:* Natalia Yerashevich, Director of the Secretariat of the Steering Committee, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

*Speakers:*

Sanaka Samarasinha, UN Resident Coordinator in the Republic of Belarus  
Young Chul Kim, World Bank Country Manager for Belarus  
Vytautas Žukauskas, Vice President, Lithuanian Free Market Institute  
Sierż Naūrodski, President, CASE Belarus (tbc)

12.00 – 13.00 **LUNCH**

13.00 – 14.45 **BELARUS` SECURITY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS**

Belarus` s security relations with Russia have been called into question by the Ukraine crisis, while Minsk has been trying to manoeuvre between the West and Russia due to improve its relations with the West but also to avoid polarization at home. At the same time it further built its relations with China, South-East Asia, Caucasus and Central Asia, the Gulf countries while has even developed a special (gold mining) project with Zimbabwe. Telling: after being (s)elected the fifth time Lukashenka did not visit Moscow traditionally, but met with Azerbaijan` s Aliev in Minsk and visited Vietnam and Turkmenistan before meeting with Russian president Putin. As Russia` s economic and market potential is sliding, Minsk` s foreign policy is re-enforcing neutrality (due to Russia) as well as hectically developing trade relations globally.

This session would give an overview of Belarus-Russia relations including in the field of security, give a track record of Minsk` s effort to develop trade and economic relations as well as trying to put these efforts into the Belarus` s political and economic framework for 2016.

*Moderator:* Margarita Šešelgytė, Associate Professor & Studies Director, Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University

*Speakers:*

András Rácz, Senior Research Fellow, Finnish Institute of International Affairs  
Artyom Shraibman, Political Editor, Belarusian news portal *TUT.BY*  
Siarhei Bohdan, Research Director, Ostrogorski Centre, Belarus  
Arseni Sivtiski, Director, Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies, Belarus

14.45 – 15.15 **COFFEE BREAK**



## 15.15 – 17.00 **BELARUS – WESTERN RELATIONS IN LIGHT OF UKRAINIAN CRISIS**

The EU relations with Belarus has been coming out from the cold in 2015: the presidential elections were not free and fair but there has been no incident, Minsk has been providing a bigger political space for opposition as well as civil society, level of direct harassment has been reduced, although there has been no systematic change. Brussels have increased assistance twofold (what is still stands annually at a meagre EUR 20 million), approved Belarus joining the Bologna process and the visa facilitation process is on-going.

This session will give an overview of these relations and will discuss where and how to develop those further from the perspective of EU, member states and Belarus` civil society.

*Moderator:* Anabelle Chapman, journalist, The Economist & POLITICO Europe, Poland

*Speakers:*

Andrejs Pildegovičs, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia

Evaldas Ignatavičius, Ambassador, Embassy of Lithuania to Belarus

Scott M. Rauland, Chargé d'affaires, Counselor, U.S. Embassy Minsk

Dirk Schuebel, Head of the Eastern Partnership Bilateral Division, EEAS

Dzianis Melyantsou, Senior Analyst, Belarus Institute for Strategic Studies

Magnus Sätterberg, Second Secretary, Embassy of Sweden to Belarus (tbc)

18.00 **DINNER** at the restaurant **“Esse”**, situated at Gedimino pr. 50.

