

Annex 3: Action Fiche – Belarus 2012

1. Identification

Title/Number	Special Measure: EU language courses for young Belarusians CRIS: ENPI/2012/23455		
Total cost	EU contribution: €2 million		
Method/ Management mode	Project approach – Direct centralised management		
DAC-code, if applicable	11230	Sector	Basic life skills for youth and adults

2. Rationale

2.1. Sector context

People-to-people contacts remain an important priority area for the European Union's relations with Belarus. Country Strategy Paper and National Indicative Programmes refer to the need for intensifying people-to-people contacts as a way of achieving "the long-term goal for Belarus to become a democratic, stable, reliable, and increasingly prosperous partner with which the enlarged EU will share not only common borders but also a common agenda driven by shared values."¹ Council Conclusions on Belarus in 2009, 2010 and 2011 consistently reiterate the importance of facilitating people-to-people contacts.² Contacts between people and mobility of citizens are also key elements of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership.³

After the latest presidential elections in Belarus in December 2010, which fell short of international standards for democratic elections, the ruling regime is driving the country into even deeper self-isolation. The post-election crackdown unfolded at a large scale and affected the most active parts of Belarusian society, including activists of civil society organizations, media outlets, university students and young professionals who faced the risk of being dismissed from their jobs because of their political views. In such circumstances people-to-people contacts acquire particular relevance as a way to reach out to the Belarusian public at large and strengthen the awareness of Belarusian citizens with regard to European societies and values.

¹ Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013 – Belarus – European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/country/enpi_csp_nip_belarus_en.pdf).

² Council Conclusions on Belarus:

17/11/2009 (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/111243.pdf),

25/10/2010 (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/117326.pdf),

31/01/2011 (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/119038.pdf).

³ As set out in the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit of May 7, 2009 (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf).

Apart from goodwill and open-mindedness, the development of people-to-people contacts requires certain capacities on the part of the participants and an infrastructure for these contacts to occur. The capacity to speak the same language is an essential condition for any cross-cultural communication to have effective meaning for both sides. As for the infrastructure, its main functions are to provide the meeting place and ensure access to it, including the freedom to travel across borders. The self-isolation of Belarus has had significant effects on both the capacities of its citizens to engage with cross-cultural communication and the infrastructure to support it. This refers in particular to the capacity to communicate freely in foreign languages and difficulty of access to EU countries in the absence of visa facilitation and readmission agreements.

To date, the priority of people-to-people contacts in EU-Belarus relations has been addressed mostly in the context of education-related programmes, such as Tempus and Erasmus Mundus. Both programmes serve the important objective of internationalization but cover a limited segment of Belarusian society. The proposed action will broaden the range of target groups, build their capacity in cross-cultural communication, facilitate travel to the EU, enhance exposure to European values, improve knowledge of the EU, and allow the targeted populations to serve as multipliers of cross-cultural competences to the wider public in Belarus. The project will also serve as a preparatory facility for young Belarusians selected for the participation in other EU-funded projects, such as Open Europe Scholarship Scheme, which is due to be fully deployed from the academic year of 2012. In addition, considering the target groups of this action, it will complement the activities in the framework of the increased EU support toward Belarusian civil society.

EU Member States, in particular those represented in Belarus, can support the implementation of this action by waiving visa fees for the participants and by helping to establish contacts with relevant professional organisations.⁴

2.2. Lessons learnt

The existing EU-funded programmes promoting people-to-people contacts such as Erasmus Mundus, Tempus and Youth in Action show that there is great interest and unmet need in Belarus in youth mobility and exchanges. Numerous youth exchange programmes within the EU over the past decades confirm the value of such opportunities for building international understanding.

The United States of America is running two successful programmes in Belarus in a similar vein. Work and Travel USA and Community Connections allow Belarusian students, community leaders and subject area professionals to visit the USA to learn more about the people and culture as well as meet and exchange views with their professional counterparts while expanding their social and cultural understanding.

2.3. Complementary actions

Several EU-funded programmes in the field of education and youth are already ongoing or under preparation. The proposed action can serve as a capacity building

⁴ Community Code on Visas allows for such waivers under Article 16, Paragraphs 4 (b), 4 (d) and 6.

REGULATION (EC) No 810/2009 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:243:0001:0058:EN:PDF>)

facility to prepare young Belarusians for more active participation in these programmes by equipping them with better language and cross-cultural competences.

EU Programmes

- Erasmus Mundus Action 1: Joint programmes (masters and doctoral programmes) of outstanding academic quality, including a scholarships scheme. Since the launch of the programme in 2004, 39 Belarusian students have received a scholarship for Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses (6 in 2010 and 4 in 2011);
- Erasmus Mundus Action 2 (previously Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window): partnerships between European and third-country higher education institutions as a basis for structured cooperation, exchange and mobility at all levels. Around 500 Belarusian nationals have taken part in this mobility scheme (2007-2011);
- Tempus, a programme which supports the modernisation of higher education in the EU's surrounding area. Belarus is currently involved in 13 Tempus projects. Tempus supports Belarusian universities to improve their administrative and organisational structures / study programs, promote teacher trainings, student mobility, consultation with entrepreneurial world, cooperation with stakeholders. Through Tempus projects, Belarusian universities develop with the assistance of European experts a number of new Master's degree programs in several fields of study;
- Studies in law, humanities and social sciences at the European Humanities University, the Belarusian university-in-exile in Vilnius, Lithuania, supported by the EU, Nordic Council of Ministers and 15 other donors through the EHU Trust Fund (2.000 students on a constant basis);
- The EU-Nordic Council of Ministers scholarship programme at universities in Ukraine; admission has terminated (currently 29 students still studying);
- Open Europe Scholarship Scheme implemented by the Nordic Council of Ministers: first students have just started in European Universities in October 2011; next intakes are expected in 2012 and 2013;
- Youth in Action supports cooperation between young people and youth organisations from the EU and its Neighbouring Partner countries by providing non-formal learning opportunities such as youth exchanges, transnational voluntary service and training and networking activities. Each year, several hundred Belarusians are involved in the Youth in Action programme;
- Eastern Partnership Regional Youth Programme. Expected to be launched by end of 2011 or early 2012.

Other donors

- The Polish 'Konstanty Kalinowski Scholarship Programme' at 17 universities in Poland in mainly social sciences (53 Belarusian students admitted in 2010);

- The Visegrad Group Scholarship Programme funded by the International Visegrad Fund, enabling studies in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia;
- Scholarships offered by individual EU Member States.

2.4. Donor coordination

The EU Delegation in Minsk organises on a regular basis donor coordination meetings with EU Member States, as well as with all other major donors active in Belarus, in order to coordinate actions in the priority areas of assistance. Such coordination is organised in compliance with principles of the Paris Declaration and is aimed to ensure maximum aid effectiveness. In addition, the European Commission and the European External Action Service organise regular implementers and donors meetings in Brussels (2-3 times per year).

3. Description of the call for proposal(s)

3.1. Basic act and Financing source

Regulation (EC) n° 1638/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument.

Budget line: 19.080103

3.2. Objectives of the programme, fields of intervention/priorities of the year and expected results

Overall objective: To enhance people-to-people contacts between the EU and Belarusian society and thereby contribute to the openness and democratization of the Belarusian society.

Specific objectives:

- To improve cross-cultural competences of young Belarusians through learning of EU languages in EU Member States;
- To raise awareness of the EU and European societies and values among representatives of Belarusian society; and
- To establish professional and personal contacts of young Belarusians with counterparts in the EU.

Target groups:

The key target groups are young people between 18 and 31 who fall under the following categories:

- Socially engaged young people, including civil society activists;
- Talented young professionals, including from but not limited to the following sectors: media, research, education, and culture and arts;

- Young civil servants;
- Graduates of higher educational establishments, especially those who intend to apply for study under EU-funded programmes.

Preference will be given to young people with disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Belarusian system of public education provides for the mandatory study of one of five foreign languages, including four EU languages: English, German, French, Spanish and Chinese. The first three account for more than 95% of students in the secondary system of education⁵. Therefore, these three languages – English, German and French – will make up the core of the action. Others may be covered on an ad hoc basis if there is sufficient demand. A certain initial level of language proficiency will be a requirement for potential students to support their ownership.

Expected results

- A number of young Belarusian people have completed an intensive language course in the EU (around 300-500 young Belarusians);
- The Belarusian participants of the language courses have improved their knowledge of the respective EU language by at least two steps in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages⁶ or in an equivalent scale, with the minimum starting level being A2 (Basic User);
- The Belarusian participants of the language courses have acquired basic knowledge about the EU and its societies and values as part of their study;
- Young Belarusian professionals and representatives of civil society organizations have established professional and personal contacts with their counterparts in the EU.

Main activities

- Selection of students in accordance with predetermined criteria (target groups and initial level of language proficiency);
- Logistical support of the selected participants, including supporting documents for visas, assistance with travel arrangements, disbursement of pocket money to cover reasonable living expenses, insurance coverage and accommodation at the place of study;
- Provision of quality language training, which will include the basic knowledge of EU institutions as well as European societies and values;
- Provision of opportunities to establish professional and personal contacts with counterparts in the EU;
- Regular monitoring of progress made by the participants, including the option to discontinue support in case of poor performance.

⁵ Report on a press conference of Belarus' Deputy Minister of Education: <http://www.interfax.by/article/70763>

⁶ Council of Europe – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp

Duration

Indicative duration of the action is 24 months.

3.3. Eligibility conditions

An open call for proposals will be launched to select a partnership of language training providers which will include language training providers of the three EU languages: English, German and French. Providers of other EU languages may be included if there is sufficient demand. Eligible applicants will be legal persons which are public, para-statal or other institutions with a public service mission and are eligible for grants under the ENPI regulation.

3.4. Essential selection and award criteria

The essential selection and award criteria for the award of grants are laid down in the Practical Guide to contract procedures for EU external actions. They are established in accordance with the principles set out in Title VI 'Grants' of the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget.

The maximum possible rate of co-financing for grants is 100%.

Full financing applies for the present action, in accordance with Article 253(e) of the Implementing Rules of the Financial Regulations, as a case "where it is in the interests of the Community to be the sole donor to an action, and in particular to ensure visibility of a Community action."

3.5. Schedule of calls for proposals

The EU Delegation to Belarus will launch the call for proposals in accordance with the following tentative schedule:

First-second quarter of 2012:

- Launch of Call for Proposals
- Application, evaluation and selection

Second-third quarter of 2012:

- Contracting
- Start of the action

3.6. Indicative amount of call for proposals

The indicative amount for this call for proposals is €2 million.

4. Support measures

Monitoring

The Commission may carry out Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) via independent consultants, starting from the sixth month of project activities.

Communication and visibility

The support given by the EU will be acknowledged in all documents and media produced in the framework of the project. Communication and Visibility Manual for EU External Actions⁷ shall be followed at all times. Communication and visibility activities should also be fully in line with the developments in the overall EU/Belarus relations, given the particular politically sensitive context.

⁷ Communication and Visibility Manual for EU External Actions:
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/work/visibility/index_en.htm