

Original Research Article

China and Belarus: Equal and mutually beneficial friendship and western misunderstanding

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Abstract: In recent years, the relationship between China and Belarus has been in the spotlight. The strategic cooperation between China and Belarus, centered on the construction of the Great Stone Industrial Park, a joint project of China and Belarus under the Belt and Road Initiative, has become a key engine for China's overseas regional development. However, there have been many speculations in the West about the cooperation between China and Belarus, and some Western politicians and media have ignored the results of the cooperation and made false accusations of "geopolitical expansion" and "debt trap" in the cooperation between China and Belarus. In this regard, it is necessary for us to clarify the source with objective facts. In order to promote the sustainable development of China-Belarus relations, the two sides are constantly expanding the space for common interests in the political, economic, tourism, transportation, and humanities fields, with a view to promoting the common interests and development of both sides. In order to safeguard the security of their common interests, the two sides need to treat each other with sincerity, strengthen mutual trust, always adhere to the principles of equality, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, and respond to false accusations with facts as China and Belarus join hands to build a common road of development.

Keywords: China-Belarus relations; principles of equality and win-win cooperation; bilateral cooperation; peaceful development; western skepticism

1. Overview of the history of relations between China and Belarus

China was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Belarus, and on January 20, 1992 it established diplomatic relations with Belarus. The development of Sino-Belarusian relations can be roughly divided into three phases.

In the first stage, from 1992 to 2005, relations between the two countries were relatively stable, with a low frequency of high-level visits, and on January 20-24, 1992, Belarusian Chairman of the Council of Ministers, V.F. Kebich, visited China, where the two sides signed documents on the establishment of diplomatic relations as well as an agreement on economic and trade cooperation. This was the first delegation from a CIS region country to visit China after the collapse of the Soviet Union, showing that Belarus attached great importance to the development of relations between the two countries. Since then, President A.G. Lukashenko visited China in 1995 and 1997, and Premier Li Peng visited Belarus in 1995 and President Jiang Zemin in 2001. At this stage, bilateral exchanges focused on the establishment of legal bases and mechanisms for cooperation, especially economic and trade cooperation, and in 1995, China and Belarus set up a commission on economic and trade cooperation, which meets once a year. China has provided assistance and loans to Belarus on a number of occasions. According to Belarusian statistics, the volume of trade between China and Belarus increased from 32.64 million dollars in 1992 to 440 million dollars in 2004^[1].

In 2005-2013, the second phase, the leaders of China and Belarus signed a joint statement in 2005, announcing that China-Belarus relations had entered a new phase of comprehensive development and strategic cooperation. After that, Xi Jinping, then Vice-President of the People's Republic of China, visited Belarus in 2010 and agreed with President A.G. Lukashenko on the construction of the Sino-Belarusian Industrial Park, and President Lukashenko's visit to China again in 2010 gave a new look to Sino-Belarusian economic and trade cooperation. Relying on the loans and investments provided by the Chinese side, such projects as mobile

communication system, renovation of Minsk-2 power station, railroad modernization and China-Belarus industrial park have been launched one after another. According to the statistics of the white side, the bilateral economic and trade turnover increased from 715 million US dollars in 2005 to 3.29 billion US dollars in 2013^[2].

In the third phase from 2013 to the present, the frequency of high-level visits has increased significantly, and relations between the two countries have accelerated from a comprehensive strategic partnership to an all-weather friendship. In 2013 President A.G. Lukashenko's visited China, and the two sides signed the Joint Declaration of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Belarus on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership^[3]. In the following year, the two countries established an intergovernmental cooperation commission at the level of deputy prime ministers, with five sub-commissions on trade and economic, scientific and technological, security, educational and cultural cooperation. In 2016, President Lukashenko visited China again, and the two sides signed the Joint Declaration of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Belarus on the Establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Mutual Trust and Win-Win Cooperation^[4] and declared the development of an all-weather friendship. During this period, the trade volume between China and Belarus fluctuated.

In 2012-2016, China's cumulative investment in Belarus totaled \$1 billion, a double increase over the previous five years. In 2016, the number of Chinese-funded enterprises in Belarus increased to 191^[5]. In 2023, trade in goods between China and Belarus amounted to \$7.677 billion, a year-on-year increase of 69.2%, of which \$5.277 billion was exported from China to Belarus, a year-on-year increase of 83.8%^[6].

In terms of the international system. Both China and Belarus believe in building a more equitable and rational international order to meet the interests of both sides, in hegemony and power politics being a threat to the international security, in the United Nations strengthening its role in international affairs, and in necessity for the two countries to cooperate with each other to deal with potential security threats. Belarus is one of the strongest partners in providing political support to China, as it has proactively stood in solidarity with China on many issues, including the Taiwan issue, the Xinjiang independence issue and the Tibet independence issue. China has also shown solidarity with Belarus on many issues, including human rights, Yugoslavia, United Nations membership fees, and the accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, and has supported Belarus in its efforts to become a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council as well as a member state of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and a BRICS partner.

At the level of the regional system. China recognizes Belarus' traditional ties with Russia and the influence of the later on the newly independent states of Eurasia, respects and supports the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the newly independent states of Eurasia, respects their desire to develop relations with Russia in all spheres, and welcomes the integration of the economies of the Eurasian region. China adheres to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and in their relations with each other. Belarus was committed not only to aligning its development strategy with that of China and fully participating in the construction of the "Belt and Road", but also supported the alignment of the Silk Road Economic Belt with the Eurasian Economic Union.

In terms of nation-states. China and Belarus are not neighboring countries, there are no disputes over territories and resources, no ethnic and religious conflicts, and there have been no military conflicts between them. Moreover, the tradition of friendship between China and Belarus is worth passing on. In 2015, Xi Jinping wrote in the "Sovetskaya Belorussiya" newspaper: "The Chinese and Belarusian peoples fought together, made great sacrifices and made great contributions to the final victory of the World Anti-Fascist War"^[7]. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has been a leader in the fight against fascism since its establishment. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese government's request for the restoration of China's legitimate seat in the United Nations was supported by the Belarusian delegation to the United Nations, as well as by the Ukrainian and Soviet delegations. After the accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, China actively provided aid to Belarus. China and Belarus have had few historical ties, a small number of people-to-people exchanges, but both have pursued friendly policies towards each other. Even during the period of deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations, Belarus was less negatively affected by the Soviet government's policies toward China because it was not positioned as an anti-Chinese outpost. The China threat theory has been largely absent in post-

independent Belarus.

In terms of policymakers, Belarus' political system has the president as its center. Among the newly independent states after the collapse of the Soviet Union, President A.G. Lukashenko is one of the leaders of the country who has been most favorable to China. Upon assuming the presidency, he stated that he should learn from China's experience in economic development, asked his ambassadors in China to focus on economic cooperation with China, and did not allow the media to create rumors that tarnished China's image. He also issued several presidential decrees to promote Sino-Belarusian relations. Successive leaders of China and Belarus have always maintained good personal relations with each other. President Lukashenko's youngest son was the only member of the family of a foreign head of state to be invited to the 70th anniversary of the victory in the II World War and warmly greeted by President Xi Jinping and his spouse, and Nikolai himself is an international student at Peking University.

In other areas, The two sides signed documents on cooperation in education, science and technology, and culture, and in 1996 they established a commission on scientific and technological cooperation. Financial cooperation between China and Belarus was also initiated at this stage, and Belarus became the first country in Europe and the CIS to adopt Yuan Renminbi as an international reserve currency.

2. Conclusion

China has provided economic and technical assistance to Belarus to help it build three phases of guaranteed housing, gymnasiums and swimming pools. In the area of culture and education, the Confucius Institute was established at Belarusian State University in 2006, the Chinese Cultural Center and the Belarusian Cultural Center have been set up one after another, and the Belarusian Ministry of Education has listed Chinese as one of the foreign language subjects in its college entrance exams. The Belarusian government encourages young people to learn Chinese language and learn about Chinese culture, and the Chinese side has provided support for Chinese teachers and teaching materials, and has increased the number of Belarusian students who are eligible for scholarships from the Chinese government, and provides more convenient conditions and flexible policies for cooperation between scientific research institutions of both sides.

Under the Belt and Road Initiative, China can continue to cooperate with Belarus to promote the modernization of Belarusian domestic railroads, including the effective connection and facilitation of the Sino-Belarusian Industrial Park with the neighboring transportation system, promote direct flights between the capitals of China and Belarus, and promote direct flights between Minsk and Xi'an and other cities in Xinjiang, and develop China-Europe shuttle trains.

In the face of Western misinterpretation of China-Belarus cooperation, the two countries have demonstrated to the world the partnership of equality, mutual trust and common development through solid cooperation results and transparent collaboration mechanisms. From economic cooperation to security synergy, from scientific and technological innovation to humanistic exchanges, China-Belarus cooperation has always been centered on people's well-being and international responsibility, injecting strong impetus to the stability and prosperity of the Eurasian continent. Transparency has always been the cornerstone of China-Belarus cooperation, and common development has always been its purpose. Whether it is the technological spillover effect of the industrial parks or the pragmatic action of joint counter-terrorism, all of them highlight the principle of cooperation between the two countries, which is "non-aligned, non-confrontational, and not targeting a third party". The West's stigmatization of normal trade and economic cooperation as "geo-expansion" is essentially an anxiety about the Eurasian continent's right to independent development. As Belarusian President A.G. Lukashenko said: "When China is strong, Belarus is strong"^[8]. In the future, the two countries will continue to provide "Eastern wisdom" and "Eurasian solutions" to global governance through the bond of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation.

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