

# EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



**Briefing for Commissioner [REDACTED] visit to Belarus**  
**Meeting with Belarus Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs [REDACTED]**  
**Minsk, 18 February 2019**

## I - Scene setter

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## II –Speaking points

**Dear Minister** [REDACTED]

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- **Nuclear safety** remains a key priority for the EU and its MS and is a common interest with Belarus. EU welcomes that the **National Action Plan** for implementation of the stress test peer review recommendations has been submitted to the Government and encourages **its swift submission to ENSREG for review.**

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Nuclear safety is the prime responsibility of the operator under the national regulatory authority, in this case of Belarus. As nuclear safety is a key priority for the EU, the EU is trying to maximise cooperation among regulators on this issue of common interest. The stress test exercise plays a crucial role in these efforts and we welcome that Belarus (and other neighbouring countries) have voluntarily conducted such stress tests in accordance with the EU methodology developed after the Fukushima accident in 2011. The EU has also been supporting the Belarusian nuclear regulatory authority with technical assistance since 2011 through – among others – the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation (INSC). This support aimed at transferring EU best practices on the regulatory process including formulation of licensing conditions and inspection practices, from site selection to commissioning and operation. The series of projects aim to transfer EU expertise and build national capacity in a way that complies with the best international practices and standards. Since the inception of the programme, the competent regulatory authority of Belarus has improved its human and technical capacity. The prime responsibility for any decisions with regard to the licencing process rests however entirely with the competent Belarusian regulatory authority. Assistance can be provided in support of the regulator's implementation of the National Action Plan to address the recommendations of the stress tests (only upon the regulator's request).

***How is the EU supporting Belarus in ensuring that the NPP meets the high safety standards?***

Nuclear safety is a key priority for the EU, in particular when new facilities are built and operate close to our borders. The EU is using the instruments at its disposal to ensure that the highest possible safety standards are followed in third countries, especially in neighbouring countries. Since 2011, the EU is supporting the Belarusian nuclear regulatory authority through the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation (INSC) to align on the EU acquis for nuclear safety. The Commission could explore the possibility of this programme to support capacity building of the regulatory authority, in the context of the monitoring of the implementation of the stress tests recommendations.

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**The EU expects that the recommendations of the Stress Test Peer Review will be duly implemented.** In the EU-Belarus Coordination Group, that took place on 12-13 December 2018, Belarus side [REDACTED]

indicated its intention to continue cooperation with ENSREG and to implement the stress test peer review recommendations.

It, however, highlighted that the nuclear power plant is planned to be commissioned at the end of 2019 and that it was impossible to implement all peer review recommendations before the commissioning of the NPP. In February, the Nuclear and Radiation Safety Department of the Belarusian Emergencies Ministry (Gosatomnadzor) drafted and submitted the **National Action Plan for the implementation of the stress test recommendations** to the government for scrutiny. The plan was agreed with interested government agencies and organizations. Once the government accepts the National Action Plan, the Belarusian regulator has to submit it to ENSREG for an assessment and comments. Being a third country, this is a voluntary process to which the Belarusian regulator has accepted to engage in.



### Stress Tests in Belarus

Belarus launched the construction of its first nuclear power plant (NPP) in 2007 and decided in 2009 on a location near Ostrovets on the Belarus-Lithuanian border. agreement was signed in July 2012 with the Russian state corporation Rosatom to build two Russian technology VVER-1200 type reactors (AES-2006), financed with a 10 billion USD loan from Russia. The first unit of the Ostrovets NPP is expected to be commissioned at the end of 2019.



LT has objected to its construction, citing safety and security concerns, poor site selection choices and failure to comply with international environmental legislation (obligations under the ESPOO Convention). The LT Parliament has adopted a law prohibiting the supply of electricity from unsafe power plants and a separate law declaring the Ostrovets NPP unsafe (even before commissioning of the plant).

The Commission has limited powers to influence energy supply decisions in third countries. Following significant lobbying by the Commission, Belarus finally agreed at the end of 2016 to conduct the stress tests (at an advanced stage of construction of the NPP) and submitted the necessary self-assessment documents in late 2017. The Peer Review Team of experts reviewed the national report in depth and prepared more than 400 questions. The European Nuclear Safety Regulatory Group (ENSREG) then conducted a peer review in Belarus in March 2018. The Peer Review report including significant recommendations was published on 4 July 2018. The report recognises the important advanced passive safety features of this new reactor compared to older operating reactors in Europe, but makes recommendations that will necessitate follow up and voluntary implementation measures.

As it has been the case for all previous stress tests within the EU and with third countries, it is now important for Belarus to submit a National Action Plan that should be peer reviewed by ENSREG in early 2019. The Commission has no power to oblige Belarus to submit such a plan but again we are using our negotiation power to condition Partnership Priorities on this action.

### Espoo Convention non-compliance case

According to the draft decision, the Implementation Committee acknowledged that Belarus had taken all required procedural steps to reach the final decision concerning the project, but found that Belarus had in its EIA documentation provided insufficient information on the alternative sites. The non-compliance decision was a rather limited caution on the procedure. Also (para 15 of) the decision, only urges BY to ensure – in decision on future investment projects - to apply the Convention correctly, so there is no direct impact on BY final decision on the choice of location [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Belarus considers that the decision was both factually and procedurally flawed and sought to present it as a discriminatory application of the Convention, “an anti-Belarusian position taken by the EU to please Lithuania” according to an MFA statement at the end of the MOP.

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