

"THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE BELARUSIAN MODEL FOR HUGO CHÁVEZ..." (C)

A CASE STUDY ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN BELARUS AND LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES IN THE YEARS 2002-2012¹

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Summary

Relations with Latin America are in fact relations mainly with Venezuela and Cuba in the political sphere, while in most of the trade turnover is accounted for Venezuela and Brazil. History and achievements of these countries' relations with Belarus are more modest than those of Arab countries, Iran or Vietnam. However, only in Latin America Belarus actually reached some results in the search for alternative sources of oil, even though these results are highly vulnerable to changes in the political environment.

Via Cuba, Belarus engaged in relations with Venezuela, which due to its weight in the region and its new international ambitions proved to be an important direction and help for finding new partners in Latin America. Therefore, the Belarus-Venezuela relations should be regarded and treated wider, as relations with many Latin American countries take place with the assistance of Venezuela.

As in many other parts of the world, the ideological aspects do not matter much for Belarusian foreign policy in Latin America. The Belarusian government has failed to establish a relationship with a number of leftist governments (Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, and Nicaragua). Many alleged political actions of the Belarusian government in support of leftist movements in Latin America should really be regarded either as a response to Belarus' own complications on the international arena (statement of support for Cuba in response to the sanctions against Belarus) or as support to Venezuelan partners in return for favorable conditions in cooperation with this country (Belarusian participation in Venezuela's modernization project in South America.)

In Latin America, however, Belarus faces the consequences of its confrontation with the United States. This is demonstrated by difficulties in resumption of military-technical cooperation with Peru in recent years.

¹ The author is grateful to Andrej Elisejeŭ for his useful remarks that helped to improve the study.

1. Introduction.

1.1. General characteristics and periodization.

From the very beginning of independence and till now, a regular partner of Belarus in Latin America is Cuba. Whatever limited economic resources and market of the country are, the Belarusian side could always rely on the "Soviet legacy": the established contacts, Cubans' awareness of the Soviet and post-Soviet standards, a number of Belarusian specialists with experience of working in this country. However, as noted by A.Cichamiraŭ, "in the first half of 1990s Belarus-Cuba dialogue stopped, but in the second half of the 1990s the relationship became regular again."²

Short-term relations between Belarus and Peru in the late 1990s – early 2000s were confined to the military-technical aspects. They declined as a result of this country's reduced needs in urgent procurement of military-technical goods and services (end confrontation with Ecuador, the defeat of leftist guerrilla groups), and following the fall of Fujimori regime in Peru. This example shows the fragility of the foreign policy and economic relations established in a short time with a strong political commitment of the authorities.

In 2004, the Belarusian president declared that "at this stage, Latin America is unreasonably moved to the sideline of our foreign policy. [...] So far we have not paid sufficient attention to the region, which is our natural ally. Belarus has similar approaches to key international problems and no fundamental ideological differences with the overwhelming majority of Latin American countries. In addition, our economies are complementary. We do not have the resources to conduct a global diplomatic offensive in the region. We have to select priority countries."³

This declaration was indeed accompanied by the greater activism of the Belarusian diplomacy in the region. The change of the political situation in Venezuela facilitated finding new contacts. Finally, in mid-2000s Belarus acquired an ally more powerful and wealthy than Cuba or Peru – Venezuela. Strong political will of top leadership in both countries allowed to launch quickly a number of projects.

The relations with other countries in the region in political terms have remained minimal throughout the analyzed period, except for Brazil and the beginnings of cooperation with Bolivia, which, however, had a much lower scale than Belarus-Venezuela or Belarus-Cuba relations. It is worth noting that, despite the minimal political contacts, Belarusian trade with Brazil reaches hundreds of millions of dollars.

The following stages in the development of Belarus-Latin America relations can be singled out:

- 1992-1999 – Inertial continuation of cooperation and sporadic contacts at a low level. Priority is given to Cuba.
- 2000-2004 – First attempts, looking for partners; one of the priorities is Argentina.
- 2005-2012 – Active cooperation development; priority goes to Venezuela.

2 Снапкоўскі У.Е., Ціхаміраў А.В. Рэспубліка Беларусь на міжнароднай арэне. // Беларуская энцыклапедыя. Мн.: «Беларуская энцыклапедыя», 2004. Т. 18, кн. 2. с. 721. [Snarkoŭski Ū., Cichamiraŭ A., The Republic of Belarus in the international arena].

3 "Foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus in the new world" – Address by President of the Republic of Belarus A.G. Lukashenka at a meeting with the heads of Belarus' missions abroad, 22.07.2004, <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press18726.html#doc>, Accessed: 05.06.2009.

1.2. Earlier research.

Save for some journalistic materials on Belarus' cooperation with Latin America⁴, this foreign policy dimension is subject of very few research and analytical works that rather have pioneering nature.

Relations with these countries are evaluated in the "Belarusian Yearbook" and "Belarusian Foreign Policy Index" of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies. Rafał Czachor devoted one of the sections in a recent monograph on the history of Belarusian foreign policy to relations with Venezuela.⁵ From time to time, there appear publications on bilateral relations with individual countries, such as Kanstancin Andryjeuski's on the Belarus-Brazil⁶ and the Belarus-Venezuela⁷ relations, which unfortunately remain within the traditional format of the Belarusian political science, which is based on description and avoids analysis and conceptual schemes creation.

We can separately mention publications which to a large degree (if not exclusively) are propagandistic materials of government agencies and organizations official representatives on cooperation with developing countries. An example would be the publication of Siarhiej Kizima on relations with Venezuela.⁸ These publications are usually characterized with unproblematic and descriptive topic presentation; they lack academic analysis, have mainly journalistic nature, and can therefore be referred to only because of the lack of scientific or critical articles on the topic.

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- 4 See, for example, Андрей Тихомиров Беларусь — Венесуэла: много шума и почти ничего. БЕЛАПААН, 21.07.2012, http://naviny.by/rubrics/economic/2012/07/21/ic_articles_113_178543/, Accessed: 03.12.2012. [Andrej Cichamirau, Belarus-Venezuela : much ado about nothing].
 - 5 Rafał Czachor. Polityka zagraniczna Republiki Białoruś w latach 1991-2011. Studium politologiczne. Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskiej Wyższej Szkoły Przedsiębiorczości i Techniki w Polkowicach, 2011.
 - 6 Андриевский К.П., Белорусско-бразильские отношения (1992-2008). // Беларусь в современном мире (Материалы 8-й международной научной конференции, посвященной 88-летию образования Белорусского государственного университета). Минск: Тесей, 2009. - стр. 25-26. [Andrijevskij, Belarusian-Brazilian relations (1992-2008). // Belarus in the Today's World (Papers of the 8th International Scientific Conference dedicated to the 88th anniversary of the Belarusian State University)].
 - 7 Андриевский К.П., Отношения Республики Беларусь с Боливарианской Республикой Венесуэла (1997-2007 гг.), <http://evolutio.info/content/view/1534/5/>, Accessed: 03.12.2012 [Andrijevskij, The Relations of the Republic of Belarus with Venezuela (1997-2007)].
 - 8 Кизима Сергей. Белорусско-венесуэльская интеграция // Беларуская думка, 2/2010, С. 25-29. [Kizima Siarhiej. Belarus-Venezuela integration // Bielaruskaja Dumka].

2. Relations before 2002

At the first stage of developing the Belarusian foreign policy activities towards developing countries (up to the early 2000s.), the Belarusian leadership applied much effort to establish contacts with China, the Middle East and North Africa.

Relations with Latin America were then considered optional – they will bloom much later. In September 2000, the official visit of the President of Belarus to Cuba took place. During 1998-2001, there were visits of high government officials to Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, Costa Rica, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and Jamaica.

In 2002, the overall share of the Belarusian foreign trade outside the CIS with the Americas (including Canada and the US, which took the lion's share of the turnover) was 7.5% (481.7 million U.S. dollars). To compare, the share of Asian countries was 11.1% (708.5 million), African – 1.7% (105.6 million), while total foreign trade turnover in the year amounted to 17 077, 7 million US dollars.

3. Relations after 2002.

3.1. Quantitative analysis methodology.

To assess the relations after 2002 we used a quantitative analysis method developed by the author. It was not used for the analysis of relations until 2002 because of the complexity to collect relevant information, since tracking official contacts *post factum* is quite a complex matter that requires significant resources.

The quantitative analysis was performed basing on the number of detected contacts between the two countries representatives and their evaluation. Trustworthy official and unofficial sources were used (national media, news agencies, official declarations, official web-sites). Since early 2011, the regular monitoring is carried out by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies in the framework Belarus' Foreign Policy Index.⁹

The applied quantitative analysis methodology originally developed in the framework of a research project on the relations between Belarus and developing countries, implemented in 2010 at the political research institute *Palityčnaja Sfera*. Under the same project, we created a database on the contacts with such countries and conducted initial analysis of the relations until July 2010, which is continued in this study.

The analysis is based on the calculation of "engagement indexes", reflecting the level of activity and contacts in Belarusian relations with a particular country or a region.

The index consists of the sum of quantified contacts (contact index) and the sum of quantified presence of the respective countries representative (representation index).

To calculate the contacts index a certain numeric value is assigned to each contact: from 1 to 5, depending on the level of importance, which in its turn is determined according to the importance of the persons involved for the state system of the respected country. In the case of visits, the importance is determined by the highest position in the delegation.

If a meeting between Belarusian and foreign representatives takes place on the territory of a third country, the level of contact is determined with regard to the Belarusian side, but this estimate is divided by two, since such contacts are generally less durable and less linked to specific agreements.

Regarding delegations, the principle of "absorption" is applied, when the numerical value of the highest official "absorbs" the values of all other members of the delegation.

Scale:

Level of contact	Numerical value
President	5
Prime Minister, Vice President and Head of the Presidential Administration, speakers of the Parliament	3
Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers of key ministries (foreign affairs, defense), Secretary of the Security Council, advisor to president	2,5
Other ministers, chiefs of staff, senior party officials	2
Other significant visits	1

To calculate the representation index the presence of permanent representatives is assessed on an annual basis, for each year of the service: Embassy - 3 points; Consulate - 2 points.

⁹ Belarus' Foreign Policy index, BISS, http://www.belinstitute.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=41&layout=blog&Itemid=35&lang=ru, Accessed: 01.12.2012.

3.2. Diplomatic missions

Cuba. Diplomatic relations with Cuba were established in April 1992. In May 1997 Cuban trade mission was transformed into an embassy. In November 1998, the Embassy of Belarus to Cuba was opened, now it includes two diplomats and two service workers¹⁰. It is probably the smallest Belarusian foreign representation, as it is likely to be economically unjustifiable and performs a narrow range of tasks.

Venezuela. Venezuela's Embassy in Minsk was opened in late 2007. Almost at the same time a Belarusian representation was set up in Venezuela, in 2008, it became a full-fledged embassy (now there are 8 diplomats¹¹, in summer 2010 there were 6).

Brazil. For a long time, Belarus was represented there only by the Consulate General in Rio de Janeiro. It was opened in September 2001 and employed only one diplomat¹². In December 2010, the Belarusian Embassy opened in Brazil, in June 2011 – the Brazilian Embassy in Minsk.

Argentina. The Belarusian Embassy in Argentina established in 1999 and there are two diplomats working there¹³, Belarus is still represented there only by *chargé d'affaires*.

The Embassy of *Peru* in Minsk, opened in 1998, was closed most likely in 2001.

3.3. Engagement index for Latin America

90 contacts were identified: 1 in 2002, 5 in 2003, 10 in 2004, 9 in 2005, 12 in 2006, 7 in 2007, 8 in 2008, 7 in 2009, 8 in 2010, 10 in 2011, 11 in 2012.

Table 1. Contacts, representation and engagement indexes of Belarus and the countries of Latin America in the years 2002-2012.

Year	Contact index	Representation index	Engagement index
2002	1,25	11	12,25
2003	6,75	11	17,75
2004	14,5	11	25,5
2005	12	11	23
2006	28,75	11	39,75
2007	18	11	29
2008	21,5	17	38,5
2009	14	17	31
2010	18,5	17	35,5
2011	17,5	23	40,5
2012	28	23	51
Total in 2002-2012	180,75	163	343,75
Average yearly	16,43	-	31,25

The table clearly shows the absence of serious relations with Latin America almost till the mid-2000s, as well as the beginning of an active foreign policy in the region in 2004. The activity intensification reflects the launch of co-operation with Venezuela. As for the figures for the whole period, the contact index for Asian Arab countries over a shorter period (2002-2011) was much higher – 292.25, as well as the index of engagement – 409.25. Both regions; Arab

10 Embassy staff <http://cuba.mfa.gov.by/rus/membership/>, Accessed: 20.01.2013.

11 Embassy staff <http://venezuela.mfa.gov.by/rus/membership/>, Accessed: 20.01.2013.

12 The Consul General of the Republic of Belarus <http://www.brazil.belembassy.org/rus/ambbellat/>, Accessed: 24.07.2010.

13 Embassy staff <http://argentina.mfa.gov.by/rus/membership/>, Accessed: 20.01.2013.

countries of Asia and Latin America, are comparable by their plurality and diversity; by many characteristics, Latin America is bigger than Arab countries of Asia, so it is obvious that in its foreign policy Belarus has paid much more attention to Arab countries than to Latin America.

3.4. Military-technical cooperation component

Table 2. Military-technical cooperation component of the relations between Belarus and the countries of Latin America in the years 2002-2012.

Year	Coefficient of contacts in the military-technical field
2002	0
2003	0
2004	0
2005	1
2006	5
2007	5
2008	2,5
2009	3
2010	7,5
2011	2,5
2012	0
Total for 2002-2012	26,5
Share of contacts, associated with the military-technical cooperation in the total number of contacts	14,66%

Share of military and military-technical contacts is visible, but it is below average in the Belarusian relations with developing countries studied before. To compare, the proportion of contacts with Arab countries of Asia, related to military-technical cooperation, in the total amount of contacts in the years 2002-2011 was 19.5%.

The increase of the number of contacts in 2006-2007 and 2010 is related to supply of arms and provision of certain services in the military-technical sphere to Venezuela, which we describe below.

3.5. Economic aspects.

Two countries of the region, Brazil and Venezuela, were the main Belarusian partners in the economic sphere. In the second half of the 2000s, Belarusian government started to achieve success in the diversification of foreign relations in the region. "Our strong point is in Venezuela, together with Venezuela we will work in Ecuador, and in Cuba, and smaller states, but especially in Brazil. We want to "land" on this continent and to get at least 5 billion turnover in the near future. This will be a significant step forward in the solution of our main problem, i.e. export. We need foreign currency."¹⁴

According to the National Statistics Committee (Belstat), during 10 months of 2012 the trade turnover between Belarus and the countries of South America was \$1.6 billion. It decreased by

¹⁴ Press conference to the Belarusian and foreign Mass Media (January 15, 2013, The National Library of the Republic of Belarus). The official internet portal of the President of the Republic of Belarus, 18.01.2013, <http://www.president.gov.by/press140878.html>. Accessed: 20.1.2013.

\$1.3 billion compared to the same period in 2011. The Belarusian export reached \$996 million, import – \$692 million. There was a surplus of \$300 million.¹⁵

In 2011, the trade between Belarus and Latin American countries amounted to \$3.498.2 billion. Exports exceeded \$1.737.5 billion, imports – \$1.760.7 billion. Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that “Belarus’ main exports are fertilizers and advanced technical products”¹⁶, it is obvious that the Belarusian side would like to significantly increase the share of mechanical engineering.

For example, the Belarusian export to Brazil for 10 months of 2012 amounted to \$747 million (imports are equal to \$198 million), but most of the exports were supplies of potassium chloride (\$721.5 million). There also was a more or less significant supply of nitrogen fertilizers (\$18 million) and tires (\$6.5 million). As for other commodities, their supply is scanty: linen cloth (\$440 thousand), polyamide (\$381 million), crops gathering and threshing machinery (\$349 million), glass (\$222 thousand).¹⁷

This situation is typical; the Belarusian export to a large extent consists of low-tech products with low added value, mainly fertilizers, which is illustrated by exports to a number of other countries in the region. For example, the major part of the Belarusian export to Ecuador is also represented by nitrogen and potash fertilizers.¹⁸

The exception is Cuba. In 2012, more than half of the Belarusian export values to this country were supplies of machinery. However, the capacity of this market for Belarusian goods is limited.

Some experts believe that the Belarusian side cannot expect further significant growth in low-tech products exports. At the same time, “to increase the supply of trucks and tractors, Belarusian companies have to make significant investments in after-sales services.”¹⁹ The Belarusian foreign ministry also carefully notes that “work on entering Latin American markets requires significant material and intellectual resources.”²⁰

15 Александр Заяц, Может ли Беларусь завоевать рынок Латинской Америки? 20.01.2013, TUT.by, http://gazetaby.com/cont/print_rdn.php?sn_nid=52880, Accessed: 20.01.2013 [Alaksandr Zajac, Is Belarus capable to win Latin American markets?]

16 Belarus and Latin America. The official MFA portal, <http://mfa.gov.by/bilateral/america/>, Accessed: 20.01.2013.

17 Александр Заяц, Может ли Беларусь завоевать рынок Латинской Америки? 20.01.2013, TUT.by, http://gazetaby.com/cont/print_rdn.php?sn_nid=52880, Accessed: 20.01.2013 [Alaksandr Zajac, Is Belarus capable to win Latin American markets?]

18 President Alaksandr Łukašenka meets with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Integration of Ecuador, Ricardo Patiño, 17.10.2011, <http://president.gov.by/en/press126025.html>, Accessed: 03.01.2013.

19 Александр Заяц, Может ли Беларусь завоевать рынок Латинской Америки? 20.01.2013, TUT.by, http://gazetaby.com/cont/print_rdn.php?sn_nid=52880, Accessed: 20.1.2013 [Alaksandr Zajac, Is Belarus capable to win Latin American markets?]

20 Belarus and Latin America. The official MFA portal, <http://mfa.gov.by/bilateral/america/>, Accessed:20.01.2013.

4. Peculiarities of the relations

Belarus' relations in Latin America remain limited to a small number of countries, even more, than in Asia or the Middle East. In fact, speaking of the Belarusian foreign policy in Latin America, we can mention the relations with Cuba and Venezuela, adding some few words on economic ties with Brazil. Due to the volume and importance of the Belarus-Venezuela relations, we devote to them a separate section below.

4.1. Cuba

The first official contacts between the two countries date back to the time when Belarus was part of the USSR. In 1970s Fidel Castro visited Belarus, and after that Piotr Mašeraŭ visited Cuba.²¹

Diplomatic relations were established in April 1992; in May 1997 Cuba's trade mission in Belarus was upgraded to the level of embassy; in April 1998, the Belarusian embassy opened in Cuba. Prior to 2000, mutual visits were carried out only by the ministers of foreign affairs. In 2000, Cuba was visited by Łukašenka, who signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.

There is no need to exaggerate its role in the relations. Despite the clear similarities in rhetoric of the Belarusian and Cuban leadership in the 1990s and 2000s, Minsk was quite skeptical about cooperation with Havana, understanding that this country is poor. The problem of poverty became more acute after years of US sanctions, which restricted the Cuban government's actions. Accordingly, the Belarusian government continued to work with this country, as the history of relations in the Soviet time allowed to continue some trade. Even in 2012, Andrej Cichamiraŭ said: "Cuba, the Island of Freedom, is poor and Minsk declares broad prospects of cooperation primarily for propaganda purposes."²²

This ideological affinity is still occasionally present in the rhetoric. For example, in the ministerial consultations in May 2012, "an exchange of views on trends in the post-Soviet states and in Latin America" took place; during the meeting of the first deputy minister of foreign affairs of Belarus, Alejnik, with the minister of foreign affairs of Cuba, "the parties discussed key aspects of development of political dialogue between Belarus and Cuba." This is quite a unique component in the Belarusian relations with developing countries.²³

In addition, the countries support each other in international organizations. In particular, Belarus clearly opposes the US blockade against Cuba. "Belarus expects that the United States of America, who consider themselves a civilized state, will finally realize the futility and meaninglessness of pressure on the people of Cuba, which has continued for more than half a century."²⁴ However, greater activity in this area coincided with the time when Belarus itself faced sanctions from the United States and the European Union; therefore such a statement can be seen as a reaction to the pressure on Belarus. Cuba shows the same support to Belarus, such as voting against UN resolutions condemning the actions of the Belarusian government.²⁵

21 Елена Лях. «Обязательно включите поездку к Машерову...». Беларуская думка, № 8, 2011, стр. 50-57. [Alena Lach. "It is necessary to visit Mašeraŭ...". *Belaruskaja Dumka*].

22 Андрей Тихомиров. Куба нужна Минску, чтобы было куда летать. 08.07.2012. http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2012/07/08/ic_articles_112_178394, Accessed: 2.10.2012. [Andrej Tichomirov, Minsk Needs Cuba to Have a place to Fly to].

23 About Siarhieŭ Alejnik's visit to Cuba, 28.05.2012, http://mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/e818156f09605f54.html, Accessed: 25.12.2012.

24 About a speech on UN Security Council resolution on US blockade against Cuba, 14.11.2012, http://www.mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/bbbb798cae0ce412.html, Accessed: 15.11.2012.

25 The UN Council condemns human rights violations in Belarus, 18.06.2011, <http://nn.by/index.php?c=ar&i=55980>, Accessed: 15.11.2012.

Table 3. Trade between Belarus and Cuba

	Trade turnover	Exports	Imports	Balance
2007	21,2	14,8	6,4	8,4
2008	49,7	35,1	14,6	+20,5
2009	16	15,1	0,9	+14,2
2010	7,4	6,9	0,6	+6,3
2011	50,2	34,1	16,1	18

It is worthy to note the level of trade fluctuation, which makes this area of foreign economic relations risky. However, in a situation when constant negative balance of trade is a major problem for Belarus, even a slight but permanent positive balance of trade with Cuba is an important point.

Cuba was important in helping the Belarusian side to find new contacts in Latin America, where Havana has good and wide connections among the leftist politicians. In addition, the countries support each other in international organizations, which is an important point taking into account the difficulties faced both by Belarus and Cuba.

An important area of cooperation was the sugar industry. In the 2000s, Belarus purchased large amounts of Cuban raw sugar for further sales in Russia, trying to withhold its non-Belarusian origin. This led to a rapid growth in trade, but in the end Russia stopped buying cane sugar, imported via Belarus. This business was ended by an agreement on drastic reduction of sugar supplies from Belarus to the Russian market imposed by Moscow in March 2007.²⁶ In the following year, the same problem arose in relations with Ukraine, which also closed its sugar market for Belarusian export. Ukrainian experts directly made accusations: "Belarus buys raw sugar cane, processes it and using forged documents imports this sugar to Ukraine."²⁷

The loss of the Russian and Ukrainian markets led to a decline in turnover, but ensured a positive balance in trade with Cuba.

Turnover growth was achieved again only in 2011, but due to a very rare, if not unprecedented step in the Belarusian trade with developing countries. Minsk gave Havana a tied loan for the purchase of Belarusian machinery (in particular, 100 buses). But it is unlikely that the Belarusian government would continue to provide such loans in future. However, it is possible that the loan was granted under the guarantee of Venezuela or through some mechanism guaranteed by this country.

It is very likely that the mechanisms of cooperation will change. In October 2012, at the meeting in Minsk between Cuban vice-premier Marino Murillo Jorge²⁸ and Belarusian foreign minister, according to official sources, "the minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of Belarus noted that given the high degree of political understanding between the countries, we should actively move from simple trade to more complex forms of cooperation." Probably he had in mind joint projects with Venezuelan funding.

In turn, the head of the Belarusian state during his meeting with Murillo said that "Belarus is ready to take an active part in the modernization of the Cuban economy. [...] I know that the leadership of Cuba became interested in developments and the system of reforms of our economy. [...] And if you think that this or that direction is of your interest, we will certainly participate in implementing it on the Cuban territory, by analogy with Venezuela." He also

26 Neither Russia nor Ukraine need Belarusian sugar, *Oko.by*, 21.08.2007 http://www.oko.by/1316-beloruskijj_sakhar_ne_nuzhen_ni_rossij_ni_ukraine.html, Accessed: 15.01.2013.

27 Ukraine does not want to buy expensive Belarusian cane sugar, 15.10.2008, <http://www.oko.by/3525-ukraina-ne-khochet-pokupat-dorogojj-beloruskijj.html>, Accessed: 15.01.2013.

28 About the meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus Vladimir Makiej with Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Cuba Marino Murillo Jorge, 15.10.2012, http://www.mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/d99c66d51454e8e9.html, Accessed: 25.12.2012.

referred to the Cuban interest in the Belarusian agriculture and the Belarusian one in the Cuban pharmaceutical industry. Murillo replied: "The issues of the Belarusian economy and the transformation of the Belarusian society for us are of great interest. It is important that we have seen all the processes with our own eyes. It is very organized."²⁹

4.2. Brazil

Contacts with Brazil started in mid 2000s. In 2004, as part of his tour around the countries of the region the foreign minister Martynaŭ visited Brazil. The following year there was the first official visit to Belarus by the Brazilian delegation, but of a relatively low level. The parliamentary delegation was headed by chairman of the foreign affairs and national defense committee of the lower house of the Brazilian National Congress, Aroldo Sedraz de Oliveira.

In addition, in 2010, Belarus was visited by a governor of one of the Brazilian states (Goiás) Alcides Rodrigues Filho, a few weeks later a return visit to this state was paid by a delegation headed by first deputy prime minister Siamaška. The most important discussion in this regard very likely was the creation of an assembly line for Belarusian agricultural production in Goiás. Now JSC "Belarusian Potash Company" and "Belshina" have their representative offices in Brazil.³⁰

Finally, in the same year, Łukašenka visited Brazil, but his visit was also held at a lower possible level. An analysis of official statements shows that the Brazilian side refrained from even symbolic rhetoric to which the Belarusian leadership inclines so much. This forced the parties to release a very strange and unprecedented for the Belarusian foreign policy in its content official communiqué:

"The President of the Republic of Belarus, Alaksandr Łukašenka, and the President of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, have confirmed the interest of their states to cooperate towards strengthening energy security and ensuring a wider use of alternative and renewable energy sources. The Heads of State have agreed to develop the bilateral cooperation in the production of biofuel, taking into account Brazil's record of achievement in the area of production and use of ethanol and biodiesel fuel. The Heads of State have welcomed the discussion held within the framework of the United Nations Organization on providing developing countries and transition economies with an access to advanced technologies in the area of alternative and renewable energy sources."³¹

However, Brazil since the late 1990s is considered one of the leading economic partners of Belarus. In 2011, Brazil was on the 8th place among its trading partners; for the last five years, the bilateral trade has tripled and in 2011 exceeded \$1.5 billion.

29 Alaksandr Lukashenka meets Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Cuba Marino Murillo Jorge. 18.10.2012. <http://www.president.gov.by/press140512.html#doc>, Accessed: 25.12.2012.

30 About opening the Embassy of the Federative republic of Brazil in the Republic of Belarus http://www.mfa.gov.by/press/news_mfa/d6726d4a3a8ea89d.htm, Accessed: 25.12.2012.

31 Joint declaration of the President of the Republic of Belarus, Alaksandr Łukašenka, and the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, 22.03.2010, <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press95522.html#doc>, Accessed: 8.07.2010.

Table 4. Trade between Belarus and Brazil³²

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Trade turnover	252,5	309,7	417,35	476,9	1228,9	604,6	922 ³³	More than \$1,5 billion
Exports	155,5	167,45	207,43	371,1	1073,8		764,9	
Imports	97	142,25	209,92	105,8	155,1		157,1	
Balance	58,5	25,2	-2,49	265,3	918,6		607,8	

4.3. Peru

Diplomatic relations with Peru were established in February 1997 and for some time the Belarusian authorities were trying to develop extensive cooperation with this country. An office of the Embassy of Peru opened in Minsk, but in the end the greatest achievement of this collaboration was the sale of some military equipment, aircrafts in particular.

A new attempt to establish contacts was made on October 20, 2011. The governments of Belarus and Peru at the level of Belarus' state military-industrial committee signed an agreement on military-technical cooperation.³⁴ This was the first inter-governmental agreement between the two countries. The agreement was ratified by the Belarusian parliament during in camera session in June 2012.³⁵

However, the Belarusian general public is virtually unaware that in December 2011 the Peruvian government decided to suspend this agreement's entry into force and to carry out technical investigation of its "feasibility and appropriateness". In any case, the agreement did not yet come into force at the moment, because it requires ratification of the Peruvian Congress. According to the Peruvian press, the agreement, which was being prepared since 2004, concerned modernization, training, maintenance of aircrafts and weapons for the army and navy. Speaking at a press conference on this occasion, the defense minister Luis Alberto Otárola added that "Beltechexport", responsible for the implementation of the activities under the contract, has a history of serious ethical violations and defects ("antecedentes de irregularidades y serios reparos de carácter ético").³⁶ However, there is no reason to doubt that such a decision by the Peruvian government is the result of pressure from the United States. It is noteworthy that pathetic pamphlet on a popular Peruvian Internet portal, already in the first sentence puts emphasis on the US and European Union sanctions against "Beltechexport". It also mentions a far-fetched allegation without any evidence that "Beltechexport" was supplying weapons to terrorists in Pakistan and Syria. The mentioned violations during previous deliveries are described subjectively and do not actually suggest that "Beltechexport" acted precisely against the norms accepted in the arms trade (where, for instance, bribery is accepted as an inevitable component of a deal).³⁷

Precedents of the US intervention in the relations between Belarus and Latin American countries always existed. In particular, partially published secret intelligence report by the Office of Transnational Security and Technology Issues, Central Intelligence Office (October 4, 1996) tells about the intervention in the military equipment trade deal between Peru and

32 According to "Trade and economic cooperation. The Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in Brazil", http://brazil.mfa.gov.by/rus/new_page_80/new_page_90/, Accessed: 21.12.2012; "20 years since the official start of diplomatic relations between the Federative republic of Brazil and the Republic of Belarus", http://brazil.mfa.gov.by/rus/press/~page_m12=1~news_m12=374041, Accessed: 21.12.2012.

33 Some sources suggest that it is \$862,6 million. See, for instance "Opens Embassy of the Federative Republic of Brazil in Belarus", The Press Service of the Belarusian MFA, 02.07.2011. <http://www.embassybel.ru/news/0d3bdcab476e.html>, Accessed: 12.10.2012.

34 A new impetus to bilateral cooperation in the military-technical sphere between the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Peru, 20.10.2011, http://www.vpk.gov.by/news/comm_news/859/, Accessed: 25.12.2012.

35 Agreement on military-technical cooperation with Peru ratified in camera, 21.06.2012 http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2012/06/21/ic_news_112_395730/, Accessed: 25.12.2012.

36 Suspenden negociación con Bielorrusia. 17/12/2011. <http://www.elperuano.pe/Edicion/noticia-suspenden-negociacion-bielorrusia-33924.aspx>, Accessed: 20.12.2011.

37 Gato escaldado no entra al agua dos veces 10.12.2011, <http://peru21.pe/2011/12/10/impres/gato-escaldado-no-entra-al-agua-dos-veces-2002572>, Accessed: 25.12.2012.

"Beltechexport" (albeit with Peruvian and Swiss intermediary, and allegedly the deal was carried out by a Russian partner).³⁸

Thus, the cooperation with Peru remains an unaccomplished undertaking. The official Belarusian side admits that "over the past decade, the volume of bilateral trade between the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Peru has not undergone significant changes, despite the projected growth trends."³⁹ In 2005, the trade amounted to \$4.5 million; in 2010, it was more than \$3.6 million with Belarusian exports being mere \$92.8 thousand.

In 2011, the trade amounted to nearly \$5.8 million. The Belarusian exports reached a record high of more than \$2.8 million with a clearly negative balance.

4.4. Contacts with Ecuador. Political relations with Ecuador were established in the early summer 2010, when the country was visited by Šejman in the framework of his trip to the region. At that time, Šejman was advisor to president of Belarus. However, the relationship developed slowly. In the next year, 2011, there were two visits and last year alone, there were four visits of branch agencies representatives and the visit of the Belarusian president Łukašenka to Lima.

The initiative came from the Belarusian side, whose envoys as a rule visited Ecuador, sometimes as part of their Latin America tours. However, so far the results are controversial. Politically the sides seem far from being unanimous. Take for example a conspicuous fact that during the visit of one of the Belarusian delegations to Lima in August 2012, the Ecuadorian court refused to extradite a former Belarusian internal ministry officer A. Barankouŭ.

Given the reputation of the initiator of the Belarus-Ecuador relations, Šejman, who is considered to be particularly close to the head of state and performs his special assignments, which often deals with security and defense issues, there is reason to believe that there were great hopes pinned on Šejman's mission. In particular, he could discuss the military-technical cooperation. But all the other known contacts, excluding the visit of Łukašenka in 2012, were carried out between the civilian agencies. Of course, during Łukašenka's visit the agreement on cooperation was signed not only in the field of education, commerce and housing, but also in the field of defense. The Belarusian leadership, like in many other countries, is trying to make cooperation in the defense field a normal element of foreign policy. However, there is no reason to see the military-technical cooperation as the main or even the only part of any contacts between Belarus and developing countries. Concerning the relations with Ecuador, it is especially true since one can only speak of very general agreements.

Of course, the Belarusian side could find fertile ground to promote military-technical projects in Ecuador. Some of the Ecuadorian media, commenting the documents signed during the visit of the Belarusian leader, underlined that the government of this country continues the policy of strengthening the national army. Defense minister Miguel Carvajal said that speaking of a military agreement he refers to a framework agreement ("convenio marco general"), allowing to expand cooperation in areas such as training, research and exchange of officers. He said nothing about purchasing any equipment, but as an example of the possible areas of cooperation, he mentioned: "For many years Ecuador operates helicopters of Russian production, which were partially developed in Belarus, and it is very important for us to strengthen our ability to service them."⁴⁰ It means that Belarus uses its image of a post-Soviet country and Russian ally to advance even on a fairly unconventional market for it: helicopters service.

38 Peru Moving Ahead With Arms Deals. Fighter Acquisition. Intelligence Report, 04.10.1996, Office of Transnational Security and Technology Issues, Central Intelligence Office (*The large part of the document still remains secret*).

39 Belarus-Peru: The Edge of mutual interest. The National Centre for Marketing and market opportunities, http://export.by/resources/izdaniya_i_publicacii/belarus_%E2%80%94peru_grani_vzaimnih_interesov.html, Accessed: 25.12.2012.

40 Bielorrusia promete entregar tecnología militar a Ecuador. 29.06.2012, <http://www.hoy.com.ec/noticias-ecuador/bielorrusia-promete-entregar-tecnologia-militar-a-ecuador-553490.html>, Accessed: 25.12.2012.

4.5. Other countries.

As for the other states in the region, Belarus made notable efforts to improve relations with Bolivia, Nicaragua and Argentina, but these attempts never reached even the level and scope of the contacts that took place in case of Ecuador. Speaking about the contacts with Bolivia and Nicaragua, it should be noted that the attempts to start cooperation are likely to be associated with the mediation of Cuba and Venezuela. Therefore, these contacts were largely carried out in the context of Belarus-Venezuela relations.

The Belarusian government in its penetration to Latin America markets used the ambitions of Venezuelan leader who did not hide his desire to unite Latin American (and other) countries in their "anti-imperialist" fight. Ecuador has already supported some steps of Chávez in this direction. Therefore, Belarusian contractors could well join the practical implementation of some Latin American cooperation projects guaranteed by Venezuela.

In summer 2006 the Belarusian leader declared that in the developing world we need to "actively promote not only traditional products, but also join the implementation of major regional projects, such as, for example, the construction of a Pan-Latin-American gas pipeline or a gas pipeline Iran-Pakistan-India, reconstruction of the Panama Canal, development of the north-western regions of China."

At the same time, Łukašenka avoids politicization. He can loudly criticize the unipolar world, the US and EU double standards, but he did not want to be committed in the framework tripartite cooperation Venezuela-Belarus-Syria proposed by Chávez.⁴¹

41 Сяргей Богдан. Далей няма куды: Беларускія перспектывы ў Эквадоры. 21 октября 2011. <http://nmbny.eu/news/analytics/3346.html>, Accessed: 25.12.2012 [Siarhiej Bohdan. That's the Limit. Prospects for Belarus in Ecuador].

5. Venezuela

5.1. Political relations

As in the case of the Belarus-Iran relations, at least at the beginning - that is in the late 2000s - greater interest in establishing relations was showed not by Minsk, but by the foreign partner. What is more, the Venezuelan side made contact with Belarus through another actor, that interested in promoting such relations – Cuba. Short of money and eager to get the Venezuelan financial aid, Havana was trying in this way to pay back to Caracas.

It seems that the Cuban mediation played an important role in establishing links between Minsk and Caracas. Since Venezuela has never belonged to the group of countries that were close to the Soviet Union, Belarus initially did not have any experience and contacts for cooperation with this country. This fact makes this foreign policy direction different from both the Cuban and Peruvian ones in the 1990s. According to Rafał Czachor, "to a certain extent, the development of the Belarus-Venezuela relations had the character of a forced cooperation in the face of disapproving reaction from the global superpower".⁴²

Diplomatic relations were established only in 1997 in a very formal way through Belarus Permanent Mission to the UN. More or less close contact between foreign ministers took place in February 2003 at the 13th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement. The next meeting between the same ministers also took place at the Durban Conference of the Movement in 2004. Only in October 2005, Belarus was visited by the first official government delegation from Venezuela. In July 2006, Belarus received the Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, who signed with Łukašenka a "Declaration of long-term strategic partnership", memoranda of mutual understanding in the political sphere and in the field of agricultural, scientific, technological and innovations-related cooperation. Analysts close to the Belarusian opposition expressed skepticism about this new area of cooperation. "Belarus and Venezuela have very little in common. Both countries have only a similar policy towards the United States. This is an outspoken, orthodox and sharp anti-Americanism".⁴³

In September 2006, the two leaders met during the 14th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana, where they signed a memorandum to establish a joint high commission. On his return home Łukašenka declared about the creation, by efforts of Belarus, of a "political arc" consisting in particular of Venezuela, Cuba, Iran, Malaysia, South Africa. Chávez visited Belarus again for a short stay on June 29, 2007, during which agreements were signed on holding political consultations and cooperation in the fields of science, technology, innovation, energy, oil industry and agriculture. In his official speech, Chávez said: "We ask Belarus to help us make a technological leap". Soon Łukašenka paid his first visit to Venezuela (December 6-9, 2007). In September 2009, the Venezuelan president for the fourth time visited Minsk on his way to Moscow, describing the prospects of further development of the relations as "a new union of republics. These will be free republics with their own systems, but united into an alliance."

Later, Łukašenka visited Caracas during a fairly long tour in Latin America in March 2010. On June 26-27, 2012, during the third visit of the Belarusian leader both sides showed slightly different view of the situation. When Łukašenka emphasized the need for diversification of economy, Chávez declared: "In recent years, we have built not just a strategic alliance, but the brotherhood."

42 Rafał Czachor. *Polityka zagraniczna Republiki Białoruś w latach 1991-2011. Studium politologiczne*. Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskiej Wyższej Szkoły Przedsiębiorczości i Techniki w Polkowicach, 2011. p. 202.

43 Valer Karbalevič in: P.Kościński, Chávez u Łukaszenki, Rzeczpospolita, 25.07.2006.

5.1.2. Administrative resources.

The success of the Belarusian projects in Venezuela is probably based on the support of president Chávez. Moreover, unlike Iran, where the support from a group of political elite (especially Ahmadinejad) does not guarantee a successful resolution of the issues, but guarantees the opposition from other groups, in Venezuela, president Chávez authority faces no such opposition from within the state apparatus.

In July 2009, president Łukašenka underlined “promptness and consistency” in actions of the president of Venezuela. In the course of his meeting with Venezuelan energy minister, he said “The visit of the Venezuelan Vice President to us, which took place recently, and the fact that you have arrived here (within a short period of time after that visit) on the instructions of the Venezuelan leadership to address some bilateral issues – all this shows that Venezuela has a definite intention to deepen its relationship with Belarus”.⁴⁴

Alaksandr Kłaskoŭski points at the ideological and moral-psychological reasons. “Łukašenka and Chávez are both talented populists and denouncers of American imperialism. A kinship of souls has emerged on this basis. It is significant that in Venezuela Łukašenka promised to implement joint projects “to spite our enemies.” As Kłaskoŭski recalls, Łukašenka stressed to Chávez: “But for you, there would not be these projects, there would not be Belarus in Venezuela.”

5.1.3. Common vision.

It is difficult to say whether Belarus is perceived in Latin America as a separate country or just a part of USSR/Russia. Even the Cuban ministry of foreign affairs, referring to the news agency “Prensa Latina”, provides news about the visit to the island of the Belarusian defense minister, in which only once at the beginning he is called “Belarusian minister of defense”, while after referred to as the “Russian minister” and “top Russian military official”.⁴⁵

In Venezuela's foreign and domestic policies, president Chávez probably considered alliance with Belarus as a prestigious matter. This is quite logical, given the Venezuelan problems in the relationship with the western states.

Speaking in 2006 at the opening of the joint Belarusian-Venezuelan commission in Caracas, Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez said: “it is a country more advanced than ours, due to geographical, historical and political reasons, but which speaks to us on an equal footing and is ready to share with us its knowledge.” According to him, “every day Belarus increasingly manifests itself as one of the most developed countries in Eastern Europe and in the world, showing a sustainable growth in such areas as petrochemicals, mining, defense, science and technology, as well as the food security”.⁴⁶

In July 2008, Hugo Chávez said that Belarus and Venezuela are building a strategic alliance, i.e. “political, economic, energy, technological and social alliance. An alliance from any point of view.”⁴⁷ In 2009, the prospects were moved forward and the head of Venezuela announced that Belarus and Venezuela have to enter into a new global alliance.⁴⁸ “We should create a new

44 President Alaksandr Łukašenka Meets With Rafael Ramírez Carreño, Minister of Energy and Petroleum of Venezuela, 02.07.2009, <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press74161.html>, Accessed: 09.07.2010.

45 Belarus Official Visits Cuba // Havana, 18.07.2006 (Prensa Latina), <http://www.cubaminrex.cu/English/currentissues/2006/Belarus%20Official%20Visits%20Cuba.htm>, Accessed: 09.07.2009.

46 Елена НОВОЖИЛОВА Белорус и венесуэлец — братья навек! 07.09.2006, http://naviny.by/rubrics/economic/2006/09/07/ic_articles_113_147880/, Accessed: 9.7.2009 [Elena Novozhilova, A Belarusian and a Venezuelan—brothers forever].

47 Development of the relationship with Venezuela in various areas is one of Belarus' foreign policy priorities, 23.07.2008, <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press59811.html#doc>, Accessed: 09.07.2009.

48 The topic was further discussed during the visit of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to Belarus in July 2010. See: Belarus, Venezuela and Syria prepare draft trilateral cooperation // Deutsche Welle, 26.07.2010. <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,5839442,00.html>, Accessed: 26.07.2010.

union of republics. These will be free republics with their own systems, but united into an alliance”.

Chávez explained that this idea does not imply the unification of all in one bloc, but allows for creating different blocs, different ‘smaller nuclei’ all of which united into one alliance. “This alliance envisages financial, economic, technological, cultural, and other kinds of cooperation, and a new common development strategy.” In this case, according to the Venezuelan president, Venezuela sees Belarus as a strategic partner, as well as “a pole of moral force in the global arena”.⁴⁹

This idea has found a certain response within the Belarusian establishment whose representatives state that “the integration between Belarus and Venezuela, weaker countries by the standards of the United States, Russia or China, separated by thousands of kilometers, is developing as intensely as the mid-1990s integration between the neighboring Belarus and Russia”.⁵⁰ They recognize the leading role of Belarus and write about “the attractiveness of the Belarusian model” for Hugo Chávez, “since something that Venezuela should come to as a result of the titanic efforts has become a *fait accompli* in Belarus”.⁵¹

Famous Belarusian ideologue Siarhiej Kizima puts a special emphasis on the fact that, while Russia and China are investing huge sums and resources to get access to Venezuelan raw materials and market, Belarus, on the contrary, gets loans from Venezuela as well as access to its fields and markets. “The level of the Belarus-Venezuela cooperation is in many respects unprecedented, resulting from well-crafted ideological component of the foreign policy of Belarus”.⁵²

Viktar Šejman, secretary of the Security Council, explained the rapid development of the relations between the leadership of both countries by identity of views on key political, economic and social issues, as well as a high level of mutual trust. They see the future of the world in multipolarity, based on peace, cooperation and general mutual respect.⁵³

5.1.4. Venezuela as a platform in Latin America.

At the beginning of cooperation with Venezuela, Belarusian President noted the interest of Belarus to “deploy its foreign economic strategy” in Latin America⁵⁴, promising “to provide any opportunities for Venezuela in Europe.” This is indeed is the better option for entering into markets of the continent than the more remote and isolated Cuba. The objective to penetrate to Latin American markets is set by the Belarusian president quite regularly. According to him, “it is not even a matter of Belarus-Venezuela relations. It is a matter of our joint advancement with Venezuela in Latin America. I would like to underscore the fact that it is with your country, because it would be very hard for us to work there alone. By doing so we can demonstrate our possibilities, show other Latin American countries that it is possible to cooperate with medium-sized and small countries and have the same effect as from cooperation with such giants as the United States and others.”⁵⁵

In 2009, the same was said by Chávez, who declared that thanks to close cooperation between Belarus and Venezuela now all Latin America knows about Belarus: “Several years ago nobody

49 Belarus, Venezuela Identify New Avenues For Cooperation 09.09.2009 <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press69899.html#doc>, Accessed: 03.08.2010.

50 Кизима Сергей. Белорусско-венесуэльская интеграция // Беларуская думка, 2/2010. Ст. 25. [Kizima Siarhiej. Belarus-Venezuela integration // Bielaruskaja Dumka].

51 Ibid., p. 26.

52 Ibid., p. 28.

53 В. Волянюк. Венесуэла: мост в Латинскую Америку. Вестник внешнеэкономических связей, №3, 2007. [V. Volyanyuk. Venezuela: a bridge to Latin America. Viestnik Vneshnieekonomicheskich svyaziej].

54 Alaksandr Lukašenka meets with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Venezuela 22.10.2005 <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press16134.html#doc>, Accessed: 26.07.2010.

55 See, for example, President Alaksandr Lukašenka meets With Rafael Ramírez Carreño, Minister of Energy and Petroleum of Venezuela, 02.07.2009, <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press74161.html>, Accessed: 26.7.2010.

knew about it. When I came to Fidel Castro in my time and told him about the results we had in the relationship with Belarus, he said to me: 'Chávez, you are like Columbus.'⁵⁶

Of course, Łukašenka also said that in Latin America "The main target of our foreign policy efforts should be Brazil. As the leader of South America, it keeps the keys that can open to Belarus the doors of political and economic cooperation with other countries in the region."⁵⁷ However, in reality the Brazilian direction has never had the slightest chance to be in political terms as important as the Venezuelan one, therefore such statement is a mere declaration.

In June 2012, the Belarusian leader once again went on a visit to Cuba, Venezuela and Ecuador. The key element of this visit was Venezuela. As Łukašenka admitted in an interview with the Venezuelan television channel, "In the course of this visit, according to our common plan with Chávez, I visit Cuba. And I will hold a dialogue on cooperation between the three countries: Belarus, Venezuela and Cuba. I must say that Chávez has done a lot for my visit to Cuba."

Relations with Cuba have indeed for a long time been marked by stagnation, in part because of weak solvency of this country, but the problem can now be solved thanks to the Venezuelan funding. Relations with Ecuador have not been developed yet and still look problematic, since Ecuador is one of the most geographically remote countries from Belarus. But again, the opportunities of Belarusian penetration there look different if the possible cooperation with Venezuela is taken into account. This is the view of Belarus' leadership. In the same interview, Łukašenka says: "Later I visit Ecuador. (...) Again, we will focus on trilateral cooperation: Ecuador - Venezuela - Belarus". Moreover, "We are working on several issues in other areas of cooperation - Nicaragua, other states of the Caribbean. At some moment, Hugo Chávez has done a lot for us to launch a dialogue with Brazil, Argentina, and Chile."⁵⁸

The cooperation between Belarus and Venezuela provided ground for allegations of Belarus' participation in the Venezuelan support for Colombian rebels. In May 2008, the Spanish newspaper *El País* revealed that Venezuela, with the help of Belarus, was going to sell arms to the rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). *El País* referred to sources in the Colombian government who allegedly said that in the computer of one of the rebel leaders who was killed on 1 March 2008, they found a partially encrypted letter dated by 8 February of the same year. In it, among other things, one of the rebel leaders, Ivan Marquez, was explaining to other members of the FARC Secretariat that Chávez had probed with the Belarusian authorities the possibility of supplying arms to them. "The Belarusian friend suggested batch cooperation through the black market in order to avoid problems. On the 17th of this month, a top representative of the friend will come to Caracas to complete the list. "Angel" requested us to be there in person to meet with a representative. This is the key." According to *El País*, the "friend" meant Viktor Šejman, state secretary of the Security Council of Belarus⁵⁹, and "Angel" ment Chávez. Šejman indeed has always played a big role in establishing contacts with Latin America, and in June 2012 he was even awarded an order by Chávez⁶⁰, but the 2008 allegations only remained as indirect speculation over vague FARC documents. It should also be remembered that *El País* was known for its clearly negative attitude to Chávez and a number of early 2000s leftist governments in Latin America. Allegations were reproduced by *The Wall Street Journal* which also has an ideologically motivated attitude to the problem.

56 Belarus, Venezuela Identify New Avenues For Cooperation, 09.09.2009, <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press69899.html#doc>, Accessed: 26.7.2010.

57 "Foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus in the new world" – Address by President of the Republic of Belarus A. Łukašenka at a meeting with the heads of Belarus' missions abroad, 22.07.2004, <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press18726.html#doc>, Accessed: 26.7.2010.

58 Alaksandr Łukašenka gives interview to Venezolana de Television TV channel, 19.06.2012, <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press137426.html#doc>, Accessed: 26.7.2010.

59 Los guerrilleros intentaron comprar misiles tierra-aire en el este de Europa. Miembros de las FARC contactaron con traficantes de armas en Bielorrusia, 10.05.2008, http://elpais.com/diario/2008/05/10/internacional/1210370407_850215.html, Accessed: 26.12.2012.

60 Chávez condecora con Estrella de Carabobo a general de Bielorusia. El Universal, 24 de junio de 2012. <http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/120624/chavez-condecora-con-estrella-de-carabobo-a-general-de-bielorusia>, Accessed: 26.12.2012.

5.2. Economic aspects

Belarus-Venezuela cooperation is linked with president Chávez' course of socialist modernization of his country, this cooperation was strongly promoted by friendly relations between the two leaders.

In his interview to Venezuelan television, the Belarusian leader said: "We initially agreed with Chávez that (...) we will take an active part in creating the industrial base of your country. We are ready to participate in the development of Venezuela, (...) to create a strong industrial and agricultural sector in your country."⁶¹

Political relations between Belarus and Venezuela are far ahead of their economic cooperation. It is evident from the indicators of trade turnover between Belarus and Venezuela.

Łukašenka himself emphasized the pragmatic nature of these relations. "Chávez looked around and said that he would like this, and this, and this... I said, well, we'll do that, pay the money."⁶²

In his speech in 2008, Łukašenka speaks of the big financial capacity of this country related to its oil fields, although he casually mentions the political component of this relationship. "Look at how actively and dynamically we started our cooperation with Venezuela. Our country, so to say, opened a window to South America. We gained access to the rich oil resources, entered a new market for our products and services, we acquired a reliable political ally, Hugo Chávez, whoever might not like him.

Belarus-Venezuela relations are real contribution of our countries in the establishment of a multipolar world. Together we represent strength, significant even for superpowers.

Many [...] would say: why on earth do we need Venezuela? [...] We went to Venezuela not only because we want to be friends with them. It's too far away. But why do we go there? Because it is the place where we are welcome. Because we do not have what they do, and they do not have what we do."⁶³

Moreover, he emphasizes that Chávez provided support to Belarusian plans of oil production in Venezuela. "He invites his main company [...] and says: it is necessary to create a joint venture with Belarusians on the existing oil fields. And they give us a part of this company [...] and say, please, purchase it. [...] Tell me what state would make such gifts today? Even the closest state, Russia, did not do it, unfortunately. [...] And here we have solved the problem over one year."⁶⁴

In June 2012, first deputy prime minister Siamaška declared that Belarus and Venezuela in the coming years plan to implement joint projects with a total value of about \$5 billion.⁶⁵ At the same time, the information was announced about Belarus' planned participation in the construction of the spaceport in Venezuela.

One of the factors limiting the development of Belarus' relations with developing countries is the limited investment opportunities of the Belarusian side. The official Minsk avoids investing its own money even in quite secure projects. For instance, it was the case when Iran provided the opportunity to produce oil on its territory. It especially concerns less profitable projects. In summer 2012, Belarus received a new contract for power plant inspection in the Venezuelan

61 Alaksandr Łukašenka gives interview to Venezolana de Television TV channel, 19.06.2012, <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press137422.html#doc>, Accessed: 26.12.2012.

62 The speech of Alaksandr Lukashenka at a meeting with the students of the Belarusian State University 12.02.2008, <http://www.president.gov.by/press55946.html>, Accessed: 26.12.2012.

63 The speech of Alaksandr Lukashenka at a meeting with students of the Belarusian State University 12.02.2008, <http://www.president.gov.by/press55946.html>, Accessed: 26.12.2012.

64 The speech of Alaksandr Lukashenka at a meeting with students of the Belarusian State University 12.02.2008, <http://www.president.gov.by/press55946.html>, Accessed: 26.12.2012.

65 Беларусь пабудуе электрастанцыю ў Вэнэсуэле, 28.06.2012, <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24628947.html>, Accessed: 26.12.2012. [Belarus will construct a power plant in Venezuela].

state of Barinas, but at once it became known that this would be done at the expense of a Chinese loan of about one billion dollars.⁶⁶

“Our relations with Venezuela are result of two factors. The first one is the Venezuela’s desire and ability to make “gifts” to friendly countries. The second factor is that Chávez expelled from the country multinational corporations and that gave Belarus the opportunity to fill the niches that were freed, albeit by lower quality goods and services⁶⁷,” noticed Siarhiej Čały. If the TNC return “then we simply will have no space.”

In summer 2012, Andrej Cichamiraŭ expressed his very skeptical point of view about the results of the collaboration: “One can agree that Belarus has marked its presence in Venezuela, but it is hard to call that expansion, especially given the decline in trade.”⁶⁸

Stas Ivaškievič offers a radically different version of Caracas-Minsk collaboration. He makes use of widely spread in Belarusian opposition political space ideas about universal Moscow's influence and treats Belarus-Venezuela cooperation as a particular case of such influence. Summing up, he says “without support from the Kremlin, which actually created this union of Caracas and Minsk in its own interest, the economic cooperation between the two allies is prone to extinction⁶⁹.” In his view, the reduction of trade turnover in the last two years happened due to barter agreements that Minsk received in return for the delivery of Russian arms to Venezuela.

Table 5. Trade turnover between Belarus and Venezuela ⁷⁰

Year	Trade turnover (millions, U.S. dollars)	Exports	Imports	Balance	Remarks
2000	2,1	1,9	0,2	1,7	
2001	4,8	4,8	-	4,8	
2002	2,2	2,2	0	2,2	
2003	1,2	1,2	0	1,2	
2004	15,4	15,2	0,2	15	
2005	15,6	15,6	0	15,6	mainly Belarusian potash fertilizers
2006	6,1	6	0	6	mainly potash and nitrogen fertilizers
2007	43,5	42,7	0,9	41,8	
2008	173,3	173,1	0,1	173	
2009	600	230,6 ⁷¹	0	230,6	
2010	1454,7	302,4	1152,3	-849,9	
2011	1328,6	198,8	1129,8	-931	

66 Беларусь пабудуе электрастанцыю ў Вэнэсуэле, 28.06.2012, <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24628947.html>, Accessed: 26.12.2012. [Belarus will construct a power plant in Venezuela].

67 Александр Класковский. Лукашенко продолжает открывать Америку. Naviny.by, 28.06.2012. http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2012/06/28/ic_articles_112_178311, Accessed: 04.12.2012 [Alaksandr Klaskoŭski, Lukashenka keeps discovering America].

68 Андрей Тихомиров Беларусь — Венесуэла: много шума и почти ничего. БЕЛАПАН, 21.07.2012 http://naviny.by/rubrics/economic/2012/07/21/ic_articles_113_178543/, Accessed: 03.12.2012, [Andrej Cichamiraŭ, Belarus-Venezuela : much ado about nothing].

69 Стас Івашкевич. Беларусь — Венесуэла: тайны политического альянса. Naviny.by, 27.06.2012, http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2012/06/27/ic_articles_112_178300, Accessed: 26.12.2012. [Stas Ivaškievič, Belarus—Venezuela, secrets of the political alliance].

70 According to: Major foreign trade indexes. Belstat, <http://belstat.gov.by/homepage/ru/indicators/fradel1.php>, Accessed: 18.12.2012.

71 Belarus plans to increase trade with Venezuela to \$ 6.5 billion // Interfax, March 21, 2010. http://udf.by/main_news/29357-belarus-planiruet-velichit-tovarooborot-s.html, Accessed: 26.12.2012.

There is almost no data on trade turnover on the website of the Belarusian embassy in Caracas. Therefore, there are certain differences in several figures. The 2009 column shows that the turnover has dramatically increased, permitting to achieve the 2005 target, set by Łukašenka: to have trade turnover of about \$500 million.⁷² The 2009 figures show that imports from Venezuela became bigger, probably due to the beginning of serious cooperation in the oil industry. However, the first tankers with Venezuelan oil arrived only in 2010.

The positive thing about the trade between Belarus and Venezuela is that unlike in case of most other developing countries, Belarus into Venezuela in big values imports not only potash fertilizers, but also engineering products.

First deputy prime minister Siamaška in 2010 announced that the volume of trade with Venezuela over the next few years may increase to 5-6 billion dollars. This seems to be an exaggeration, but provided the current political environment remains intact the turnover is likely to grow significantly. It will be ensured by Belarusian construction projects: a project to adapt Venezuelan machinery for gas fuel consumption, and the construction by Belarusians of three major assembly plants: the assembly of tractors, of MAZ automobiles, and of road-building equipment⁷³, and last, but perhaps most important for Belarus is Venezuela's oil supply.

It should be noted that supplying oil to Belarus, Venezuela is also entering a new European market, it is essential not only in its confrontation with the United States, which nevertheless remains an important trading partner of this country, but also in terms of a rational diversification of oil markets.

The diversity and scale of Belarusian projects run a danger to stretch resources to different directions, but on the other hand guarantee long-term cooperation, unlike in Peru (and later Sudan), where cooperation was concentrated in the military and military-technical spheres. The relations there stopped as soon as the situation changed. The Belarusian projects in Venezuela are the basis for a strong relationship which can not be rolled back as quickly as in the case of Peru and Sudan.

5.2.1. Oil production.

Back in 2007, Belarusian companies started to operate in the oil fields of Junin and Laga Media in the state Anzoátegui, after creating a joint venture "Petrolera BeloVenesolana". By 2010, it was already developing five oil fields, extracting by the end of 2010 730,000 tons of oil and 300 million cubic meters of natural gas. However, in 2012, Junin was handed over to the Chinese.

In 2010, another joint venture for the supply of Venezuelan oil to Belarus was established. During the Łukašenka's visit in 2010, an agreement was signed to supply 4 million tones of Venezuelan oil to Belarus over a year. Deliveries of Venezuelan oil to an annual volume of 10 million tons over the next three years have been agreed on during Chávez' visit to Belarus in October 2010. Some analysts suggested that it would be a pointless deal, as they claimed that Venezuelan oil will be \$100 more expensive than the Russian one. However, the Belarusian government managed to ensure the oil delivery through Ukraine and the Baltic states. In May 2010, Venezuelan oil was first delivered at the Mazyr Oil Refinery, the deliveries continued till the end of the year. For 2011 and 2012, the Venezuelan side committed to supply to Belarus 10 million tons annually. These supplies started in the situation of Russian pressure on Belarus, including through the manipulation of oil prices.

72 Alaksandr Łukašenka met with foreign minister of Venezuela, 22.10.2005, <http://www.president.gov.by/en/press16134.html#doc>, Accessed: 06.07.2010.

73 Беларусь планирует увеличить товарооборот с Венесуэлой до \$5-6 млрд // Интерфакс, 21.03.2010, http://udf.by/main_news/29357-belarus-planiruet-uvelicshit-tovarooborot-s.html, Accessed: 06.07.2010 [Belarus plans to increase trade turnover with Venezuela to \$5-6 billion].

At the end of 2010, the Belarusian government decided to abandon direct supply of Venezuelan oil through swap schemes with the participation of Azerbaijan. In 2011, the Venezuelan ambassador said that the new scheme of supply was conditioned by the high cost of raw materials transportation from Venezuela.

However, in February 2012, Siamaška stated⁷⁴ that the supply of oil from Venezuela, with the participation of Azerbaijan was efficient not only financially, but also due to the fact that they helped to conclude a favorable agreement on the supply of Russian oil (to increase supply and decrease the amount of duties to be paid to Russia). In May 2011, at a meeting with first deputy prime minister of Azerbaijan, Łukašenka said: "You defended us and saved our sovereignty and independence, as well as Venezuela did."⁷⁵

Oil supplies led to a large deficit in bilateral trade with Venezuela in 2010, but it is natural for Belarus, which is totally dependent on foreign oil supplies. However, from 2011, Belarus has also faced a reduction of its exports to Venezuela.

At the same time, in the autumn of 2011, Šejman said on the Belarusian Television that the Belarusian side will participate in the development of oil fields in Venezuela together with Venezuela and China.⁷⁶ Probably it happened for the same reason, the lack of investment funds.

Commenting in 2010 the Belarusian supply of anti-aircraft systems TOR-M1 to Venezuela, Russia Today noted that they got there in exchange for Venezuelan oil.⁷⁷

Some analysts are even more skeptical about the oil deal between Caracas and Minsk. "The supplies of Venezuelan oil to Belarus hardly had to do with the actual trade between the two countries. A lot of evidence suggests that these shipments were only a cover for illicit transactions of Belarus with the Russian oil industry."⁷⁸ However, such opinions should be treated critically, as the Russian propaganda strongly hampered the project from the very beginning and part of Belarusian audience treated the related materials in the Russian media too literally.

5.2.2. Industry and construction.

Already in 2007, agreements were reached on the establishment of joint ventures and assembly plants. In 2011, MAZ trucks plant was constructed. It was launched in 2012 and it was planned that within a year it will produce a thousand of vehicles. In addition, by the end of 2012, Belarusian companies completed or almost finished the construction of an MTZ tractor construction plant, technical center for repairing and maintenance of road construction, municipal and agricultural machinery, housing for the Venezuelan military, dairy and meat processing plants, a school and a kindergarten in Maracay, housing in Barinas, agro-town and farm production facilities in Ata Pedrigal.

Quite a loud scandal is associated with the construction. In late 2010, the head of JSC "Belzarubezhstroy" Viktor Šaŭcoŭ complained about the delay in funding from the Venezuelan

74 Семашко: Если бы не было венесуэльской нефти, то не было бы и соглашения с Россией 24.02.2012.

<http://news.tut.by/economics/276010.html>, Accessed: 26.12.2012 [Siamaška: If there were no Venezuelan oil there would not hve been an agreement with Russia].

75 Беларусь будзе працягваць імпартаваць венесуэльскую нафту да канца 2012 году, 24.02.2012,

<http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/24495326.html>, Accessed: 26.12.2012 [Belarus will continue to import Venezuelan oil till the end of 2012].

76 Belarus, China to join oil deposit project in Venezuela (Xinhua), 06.10.2011, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/7610633.html>, Accessed: 07.10.2011.

77 Robert Bridge, Putin plays his hand in Venezuela. 02.04.2010. Russia Today, <http://rt.com/politics/putin-plays-hand-venezuela/>, Accessed: 2.04.2010.

78 Стась Івашкевич. Беларусь — Венесуэла: тайны політычнага альянса, Naviny.by, 27.06.2012,

http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2012/06/27/ic_articles_112_178300, Accessed: 20.01.2013. [Stas Ivaškiēvič, Belarus-Venezuela, the mysteries of the political alliance]. Fore more details see the same author: Беларусь и нефть: по тропе контрабандистов, 22.12.2011, http://naviny.by/rubrics/economic/2011/12/22/ic_articles_113_176255/, Accessed: 26.12.2012 [Belarus and oil: on the path of smugglers].

side. In 2011, some Venezuelan media have accused the Belarusian side in poor-quality construction, theft of building materials and very low salaries of Venezuelan workers.⁷⁹ In October 2011, a criminal case was brought against Šaŭčoŭ and he was arrested. In December of the same year, Łukašenka accused him of irregularities in the construction in Venezuela.

In the autumn 2012 elections the main rival of Chávez, Henrique Capriles Radonski, directly raised the issue of cooperation with Belarus; he demanded termination of this relationship. "What do we have in common with Iran, except for oil production? Or with Belarus? Is their president not a dictator? Now, tell me! Gaddafi was twice receiver in Venezuela. Are these relations necessary for Venezuela? No!"⁸⁰ Capriles insisted that Chávez "has given as a present" to Minsk around three billion dollars.⁸¹ There is no doubt that in the case of coming to power, the opponents of the current leadership in Venezuela would make an unilateral decision to stop even undoubtedly mutually beneficial projects⁸², like in the case of the earlier mentioned case with the agreement on military-technical cooperation with Peru.

5.2.3. Military-technical cooperation.

Already during his very first visit of the Venezuelan leader to Belarus in July 2006, he signed an intergovernmental agreement on military-technical cooperation. Hugo Chávez openly declared that cooperation in this sphere would be an important area of contacts between the two countries.⁸³ The Belarusian side agreed. Viktor Šejman, then the Secretary of the Security Council noted: "in the military sphere, Belarus can contribute to the security of Venezuela."⁸⁴ According to him, the implementation of the Belarus-Venezuela military cooperation would give the economic effect of more than \$1 billion and secure orders for dozens of Belarusian defense industry enterprises for many years to come.⁸⁵

In 2007, Šejman said that Venezuela signed a billion dollars' contract for the supply of "air defense, airborne jamming systems and guidance systems of air defense missiles."⁸⁶ Some observers believe that the next deliveries of advanced air defense systems in Venezuela were made by Minsk at the behest of Moscow; Belarus acted as a delivery channel. They speculate that due to the ambiguity of arms supply on the American continent and the likely response of the United States, Russia has entrusted it to Łukašenka.⁸⁷ This motif appears regularly in the comments of the Belarusian opposition on cooperation in the military-technical sphere, in particular with Iran and Syria. In any case, there were reports on deliveries of anti-aircraft missile systems TOR-M1 in 2010, and later of the modernized C-125 "Pechora" to Venezuela.

Belarus played a different important role for the safety of Venezuela. According to military analyst Alaksandr Alesin, "Belarus is the coordinator of the project to create a unified air defense system in Venezuela".⁸⁸ Speaking about Venezuela buying Belarusian automated

79 Joseph Poliszuk. La mafia bielorrusa, 11.12.2011 <http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/111211/la-mafia-bielorrusa>, Accessed: 26.12.2012.

80 Andrew Cawthorne. Venezuela's Capriles vows to help Colombian peace talks. Reuters, 01.10.2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/01/us-venezuela-election-idUSBRE89013H20121001>, Accessed: 26.12.2012.

81 Александр Класковский. Лукашенко продолжает открывать Америку, Naviny.by, 28.06.2012, http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2012/06/28/ic_articles_112_178311, Accessed: 4.12.2012 [Alaksandr Klaskoŭski. Łukašenka continues to discover America].

82 Сяргей Богдан. Выбары ў Венэсуэле: двубой папулістаў, 05.10.2012, Наше мнение. <http://nmbnby.eu/news/express/4964.html>, Accessed: 26.12.2012 [Siarhieŭ Bohdan. Elections in Venezuela: Duel of populists].

83 Venezuela, Belarus in "strategic alliance", NUEVOMEDIA, 25.07.2006. http://www.eluniversal.com/2006/07/25/en_pol_art_25A751813.shtml, Accessed: 20.01.2013.

84 Елена Новожилова. Белорус и венесуэлец — братья навек! 07.09.2006 http://naviny.by/rubrics/economic/2006/09/07/ic_articles_113_147880/, Accessed: 10.07.2009.

85 Александр Алесин. Небо над Венесуэлой будет охранять белорусская система ПВО, Naviny.by, 09.07.2012, <http://news.tut.by/society/298532.html>, Accessed: 20.01.2013 [Alaksandr Alesin, The Venezuelan Sky will be Protected by Belarusian air defense].

86 Pilar Bonet. Caracas compra armamento a Bielorrusia por 720 millones, 24.07.2007, http://elprais.com/diario/2007/07/24/internacional/1185228001_850215.html, Accessed: 20.1.2013.

87 See Стась Івашкевіч. Беларусь — Венесуэла: тайны палітычнага альянса, Naviny.by, 27.06.2012, http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2012/06/27/ic_articles_112_178300, Accessed: 20.01.2013. [Stas Ivaškievič, Belarus-Venezuela, the mysteries of the political alliance].

88 Александр Алесин. Небо над Венесуэлой будет охранять белорусская система ПВО, Naviny.by, 09.07.2012,

command and control equipment for air defense and air forces, means of radar and electronic warfare, he says, "the Venezuelan military had to ensure an integrated and coordinated control of all these weapons. Hugo Chávez did not want to have anything to do with the countries of the West; that is why he chose Belarus". It was put in the form of a cooperation agreement to create a unified air defense system in Venezuela, which was signed on December 8, 2007. The system design was to be prepared by a joint Belarusian-Venezuelan commission.

In January 2008, prior his visit to Belarus, Chávez announced that one of the main objectives of the visit would be to negotiate details of a contract for the purchase of an air defense system with "early warning radars and appropriate range missiles". Already on April 9, 2008 the lower chamber of the Belarusian parliament during an in camera session ratified the agreement on cooperation in the establishment of a unified air defense system in Venezuela.

Under the renewable agreement, concluded for a period of five years, Venezuelan organizations had to negotiate contracts with organizations in Belarus and other countries to purchase goods and services in accordance with the project. Quoting anonymous independent experts A.Alesin notes "among the implementers of the contract, apart from the Belarusian defense industry enterprises there were to be Russian, Chinese and Iranian companies".⁸⁹

Deputy chief of general staff Piatro Cichanoŭski noted that "over a period of six years Minsk will create in Venezuela a system of air defense and electronic warfare, including professionals and managers training".⁹⁰ In about a year, a draft air defense system project was developed. In September 2009, Chávez gave some more details about it. It is worth adding that in 2012 Lieutenant-General Aleh Pafioraŭ became the Belarusian ambassador to Venezuela (in the past, the deputy chairman of the State military-industrial committee, and in 2001-2006 the commander of the air and air defense forces).

For a long time after the signature there was no official information about the implementation of the agreements, until 2012 when the Venezuelan minister of defense announced that a "Pechora base" was created.⁹¹ Relying on the available information, there is reason to believe that the project of the Venezuelan air defense system is being successfully implemented.

5.3. Cultural aspects.

The political and economic cooperation is complemented by some symbolic steps in the field of culture, designed to emphasize the closeness of the ties. Back in 2008, in the center of the Belarusian capital there was erected a park named after Simon Bolivar, the national hero not only in Venezuela, but also a number of other countries in the region. In May 2010, Minsk secondary school number 114 was given the name of Bolivar, and Homiel high school number 17 the name of Francisco de Miranda. In April 2009, Latin American Cultural Center named after S. Bolivar⁹² was established in Minsk, which also is actually a Venezuelan undertaking. Such symbolic actions take place in the relations between Belarus and developing countries only in rare cases.

<http://news.tut.by/society/298532.html>, Accessed: 20.01.2013 [Alaksandr Alesin, The Venezuelan Sky will be Protected by Belarusian air defense].

89 Александр Алесин. Небо над Венесуэлой будет охранять белорусская система ПВО, Naviny.by, 09.07.2012,

<http://news.tut.by/society/298532.html>, Accessed: 20.01.2013 [Alaksandr Alesin, The Venezuelan Sky will be Protected by Belarusian air defense].

90 Стась Ивашкевич. Беларусь — Венесуэла: тайны политического альянса, Naviny.by, 27.06.2012,

http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2012/06/27/ic_articles_112_178300, Accessed: 20.01.2013. [Stas Ivaškiēvič, Belarus-Venezuela, the mysteries of the political alliance].

91 Александр Алесин. Небо над Венесуэлой будет охранять белорусская система ПВО, Naviny.by, 09.07.2012,

<http://news.tut.by/society/298532.html>, Accessed: 20.01.2013 [Alaksandr Alesin, The Venezuelan Sky will be Protected by Belarusian air defense].

92 Belarus and Latin American countries <http://mfa.gov.by/bilateral/america/>, Accessed: 20.01.2013.

6 Summary

Latin American direction of the Belarusian foreign policy to a greater extent than the majority of other directions was a committed development of relations since 2004. These relations have a much shorter history than in the case of the Far East or the Middle East directions. The success in establishing ties with Latin America, however, was possible due to a fortunate coincidence: domestic political transformations in Venezuela. This makes the success achieved by the Belarusian side quite fragile. It should also be noted that apart the success in Venezuela, despite all efforts the Belarusian government failed to establish appropriate bilateral relations with Brazil and Argentina.

The space for the Belarusian government in the region is very limited. The only strong ally is Venezuela, with some backing from Cuba. Besides, the Belarusian side is facing opposition from the United States. In the Middle East, Belarus found the way how to work with both US allies (Qatar, Bahrain) and with US opponents (Iran, Syria). In Latin America, this scheme does not work.

Brazilian and Argentine examples clearly show that the ideological aspects play the smallest role in the Belarusian foreign policy, at least with regard to the developing countries. Left-wing governments in power in these countries did not help in improving relations. Even once close to the Soviet Union Nicaragua was not ready for substantial cooperation.

For the landlocked Belarus, the geographical distance to Latin America is a particularly noticeable factor. This is manifested in transport costs and the obvious problem of the lack of previous experience of contacts. This lack of experience explains why the Belarusian foreign ministry has repeatedly held consultations with the Russian ministry of foreign affairs on the Latin American region, at least in 2002-2005.⁹³ Information about such consultations regarding other regions of the world has not been found.

93 About consultations between Belarus and Russia on Latin American issues// MFA <http://www.mfa.gov.by/ru/press/news/2002-06-27-2.html>;
About consultations between Belarus and Russia on Latin American issues <http://www.mfa.gov.by/ru/press/news/2003-06-19-2.html>; About the development of Belarusian cooperation with the countries of Latin America. // <http://www.mfa.gov.by/ru/press/news/2004-05-06-1.html> and others, Accessed: 04.07.2009