

Capital: Minsk
Population: 9.84 million (2003)
GDP(current US\$): 17.5 billion (2003)
Population below national poverty line 42% (2003)
GDP per capita (current US\$): \$1,765 (2003)
GDP per capita (purchasing power parity): \$6,100 (2004 est.)
Religion: Eastern Orthodox 80%, (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim) 20%
Language Usage: Russian and Belarusian
President: Alexander Lukashenka
Prime Minister: Sergei Sidorsky (acting since 10 July 2003)
Ambassador to US: Mikhail Khvostov



National Interest: The U.S. has a vital national interest in a prosperous, free, and peaceful Europe which must include a stable, democratic, and market-oriented Belarus. After the first round of European Union integration, the EU will become contiguous with Belarus, leaving it potentially vulnerable to political and economic instability across the border. The US foreign policy priorities in Belarus are to help foster a political and economic environment which is more democratic and in harmony with the region, through its work to strengthen civil society, political process, and the independent media.

OVERVIEW OF USAID'S FOCUS IN BELARUS

FY 05: Total FSA - \$6.5 million, USAID Total - \$4.0 million

Civil Society Organizations (FY05 \$1 million):

USAID is continuing to support its community initiative program, aimed at increasing citizens' involvement in democratic decision making. Two approaches will be used for implementation of the program: support to community managed, socio-economic activities and capacity building for NGOs in those communities. Additional sites will be selected for training Belarusians in democratic governance, conducting community appraisal, and support in the formation of representative community project boards.

Support for Political Parties (FY05 \$1million):

USAID will focus on the following areas for the pro-democracy party training, technical assistance, and cross-border exchanges: internal governance practices, effectiveness of strategic planning and operations, membership recruitment and retention, and message formulation. The latter involves building party public relations and media communications skills, and improving the capacity for productive use of public opinion research. A civic organization will be established that conducts public awareness campaigns to educate Belarusians about their constitutional rights and democratic electoral processes.

Support to Independent Media (FY05 \$700,000):

USAID's assistance will improve the professional skills of non-state media owners and professionals, including publishers, accountants and journalists; strengthen the legal and financial status of independent media; and increase journalists' capacity to provide the public with objective, fact-based, and useful information. USAID will work with independent print and electronic media, the latter including private regional TV and radio stations. The technical assistance will include a wide range of expert services: journalism and management training, legal defense, on-site business consultations, and free-of-charge service provision (e.g., photo archive, Internet access, specialized software development and transfer, etc.)

HIV/AIDS & Trafficking in Persons (FY05 \$1 million)

USAID plans to expand its FY04 Trafficking in Persons project by supporting the TIP program managed by International Organization for Migration in Belarus. The project will provide education, protection, job training and placement to vulnerable women. Furthermore, USAID plans to support and supplement the GOB's HIV/AIDS Global grant by improving monitoring and evaluation practices and financing broader NGO participation.

Increased Legal Defense Capacity (FY 05 \$300,000)

USAID plans to extend the current program promoting human rights and the rule of law by continuing to train local lawyers, activists, the free trade unions, NGOs and the citizenry to advocate for greater respect by Belarusian authorities. Continued support will be provided to the network of Legal Advice Centers.

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