

EF.DEL/65/06
24 May 2006

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

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MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BELARUS, AT THE FOURTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE
ECONOMIC FORUM**

Prague, 24 May 2006

Plenary Session V: The link between transport and the environment

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The role of Aarhus centres

The Aarhus Convention, ratified by Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus, which regulates access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters, entered into force in 2001. It has recently been incorporated into the country's legislation and all law enforcement bodies, public officials and citizens are bound by its provisions.

In December 2005 the Aarhus Centre was opened as part of an international technical assistance project with the financial backing of the OSCE Office in Minsk for the purpose of implementing the Aarhus Convention in the Republic of Belarus. The Centre is planning to hold a number of general information events. Project funds have already been used to conduct training seminars with State executive bodies and to pay for legal consultants.

The Centre collects, collates, classifies and disseminates information on the environment, including the impact of transport on it and ways of protecting it. This information is available to legal and natural entities, which can obtain legal advice in the Centre in assertion of their right to access to justice in environmental matters.

The OSCE project ends in June of this year but the Centre will continue to operate. Financial support for the Aarhus Centre is planned from funds budgeted for nature conservation.

We thank the OSCE for the attention it has paid to these issues in Belarus. We are willing to co-operate further and would welcome any assistance in this area.

Transport and the environment

The Republic of Belarus is part of the unified European transport network and the development of State policy regarding the environmental safety of its transport system is guided by fundamental European principles.

Vehicle emissions in Belarus account for more than 70 per cent of the atmospheric pollution and some 85 per cent of these emissions come from automobiles, which leads to poor air quality in the cities.

The increase in the number of cars is outstripping the rate of development of the road network, which has had a negative influence on the road transport system and the environmental situation near motorways. (Since 1992 the public road network in Belarus has almost doubled in size while the number of vehicles has more than trebled.)

Measures are being taken in Belarus to improve not only fuel quality but also the nature of vehicle emissions. Oil refineries in the country have made significant progress in reducing the amount of sulphur in diesel (less than 0.035 per cent) and petrol (less than 0.05 per cent). A new inter-State standard identical with the 1993 European standard EN 228:1993 entered into force in September 1993 but fuel does not yet comply fully with this standard.

The European Union (EU) requirements from the year 2000 regarding the amount of contaminants contained in petrol and diesel have not yet been met either. Moreover, in 2005 the EU standards became stricter.

As its industry is gradually modernized, Belarus expects to be able to produce fuel of European quality from 2008.

Measures to introduce stricter technical standards and ensure compliance with them will have an impact on the country's oil refineries, the tax and tariff systems and also the organization of traffic. In other words, this problem is multifaceted and affects the economic, environmental, energy and transport sectors.

The main orientations of the Government policy to reduce the effect of transport on the environment are as follows.

- Promotion of the manufacture, sale and use of fuels with improved environmental characteristics and in particular with reduced benzene and sulphur content (tax relief);
- Greater use of alternative automotive fuels and sources of energy;
- Establishment of a State system for monitoring automotive fuel quality and receiving complaints;
- Reform of the system for monitoring urban air quality;
- Promotion of the manufacture and use of vehicles complying with international environmental and safety standards;

- Gradual withdrawal from service of highly polluting vehicles;
- Reduction of the use of vehicles in international transportation that do not comply with the provisions of international agreements regarding pollutant emissions, noise levels and safety;
- Application of international standards regarding exhaust gas emissions and noise levels for railways, off-road vehicles and ships;
- Measures to reduce pollutant emissions into the atmosphere and the noise levels of aircraft;
- Scientific research to improve the environmental safety of all means of transport.

Nature conservation bodies in Belarus are currently considering the need to elaborate a State programme to reduce the impact of transport on the country's environment.

I should like to thank the organizers and hosts of this Forum for the excellent organization and warm reception.

Thank you for your attention.