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Palitsfera Working Papers No. 6/2026

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Belarus and the 'far arc'
in 2020–2026

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BELARUS AND THE 'FAR ARC'

in 2020–2026

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Introduction

The economic and political importance of the Global South has become a significant factor not only in contemporary world politics but also in Belarusian foreign policy. This report builds on the analysis published by the Political Sphere Institute in 2024.¹

The political developments in Belarus in 2020–2021, together with its indirect involvement in Russia’s war against Ukraine since 2022, have significantly affected both the domestic situation and the country’s foreign policy priorities. Against a backdrop of deteriorating relations with Western countries, shrinking traditional channels of external economic cooperation and the need to diversify international ties, Belarusian diplomacy has substantially intensified its activity in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. The term ‘far arc’ has appeared more frequently in both official documents and Belarusian state media.

Since 2020, we have observed a marked increase in high-level and top-level contacts, an expansion of the treaty framework and interagency ties, and a gradual strengthening of the diplomatic presence in the countries of the ‘far arc’. This report reviews the development of these interactions in 2020–2026.

The study aims to identify the main trends in the transformation of Belarus’s policy towards the countries of the ‘far arc’, determine which regions and states gained the greatest importance during the period under review, and show how changes in the foreign policy environment after 2020 affected the scale, character and instruments of Belarusian engagement with countries beyond its traditional European and post-Soviet sphere.

Methodology. The study examines Belarus’s bilateral contacts with the countries of the ‘far arc’ from 2020 to July 2026. The overall list includes both bilateral interagency contacts (such as consultations between foreign ministries, meetings of foreign ministers at international forums, and meetings between representatives of sectoral ministries) and visits at the top and high levels (presidential and prime-ministerial visits involving not only talks between heads of state or government but also a wide range of interagency meetings at lower levels).

The analysis is based exclusively on open sources, so the total number of events recorded for 2020 – July 2026 may be incomplete. In addition, some episodes are mentioned in individual articles or briefing materials only as part of a list of bilateral contacts, without detailed information on their proceedings or outcomes.

¹ Stakavetski, Yury (2024). Belarusian Foreign Policy towards the Global South: Main Trends and Challenges. <https://palityka.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Foreign-Policy.pdf>

The sources comprise materials from the official websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belarusian diplomatic missions abroad, Belarusian ministries, the Council of the Republic and the House of Representatives of the National Assembly, the BelTA news agency, and official Belarusian media outlets (Belteleradiocompany, ONT and SB. Belarus Segodnya).

General trends

Although the term ‘far arc’ first emerged in the 2000s, it became firmly established in Belarusian foreign policy in 2016 through the National Programme for Export Support and Development of the Republic of Belarus for 2016–2020, approved by Council of Ministers Resolution No. 604 of 1 August 2016. This document explicitly identified the countries of the ‘far arc’ as a focus of export policy. The goal was to diversify exports gradually, approximately according to the formula: EAEU — EU — other countries/‘far arc’ $\approx 1/3 : 1/3 : 1/3$.

The programme directly linked this policy to promoting Belarusian goods in Asian, African and Latin American markets. It provided the following definition: ‘New promising markets in the countries of the “far arc” comprise the countries of the world, excluding the EAEU, CIS, EU, Brazil, Venezuela, Vietnam, Georgia, India, China, Cuba, Mongolia, Nigeria, Pakistan, the United States and South Africa.’

For the purposes of this review, we understand the ‘far arc’ as the combined areas of Belarusian foreign policy activity in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In its foreign policy materials, the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs traditionally identifies the following regions as belonging to the ‘far arc’:

***Asia and Oceania** — all countries east of Iran, excluding the post-Soviet states. The region combines Asia, the world’s largest macroregion by population and economic potential, with the much smaller Oceania. In 2025, Asia and Oceania had a combined population of approximately 4.88 billion (4.84 billion in Asia and around 46.6 million in Oceania) and a combined nominal GDP of about US\$44.4 trillion (around US\$42.3 trillion in Asia and US\$2.1 trillion in Oceania). For Belarus, **China** occupies a central position in the region, with relations holding the status of an all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership. Other major partners include **India, Iran and Pakistan** and, in Southeast Asia, primarily **Vietnam and Indonesia**.*

Trade forms the foundation of economic engagement: Belarus primarily supplies potash fertilisers, machinery, chemical products and food to countries in the region, while also viewing major Asian economies as potential sources of investment. Industrial cooperation and assembly operations, scientific, technological and innovation cooperation, education, and transport and logistics links are developing. In relations with China, Belarus’s participation in the Belt and Road Initiative and the development of the Great Stone Industrial Park are of particular importance.

Africa and the Middle East. This includes the African continent and the Middle Eastern countries west and southwest of Iran: Turkey, Iraq, the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and others. In 2025, the region's combined population was approximately 1.9 billion and its total nominal GDP around US\$7 trillion. A substantial share of the Middle East's economic potential is concentrated in the oil, gas and financial centres of the Persian Gulf, while Africa's largest economies in the north, south and west of the continent play a leading role. For Belarus, both areas are among the fastest-developing components of its 'far arc' policy. Its principal African partners include ***Egypt, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria***, while in the Middle East they include ***the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria***.

In Africa, the main areas of cooperation are export expansion and industrial cooperation: the supply of trucks, mining and agricultural machinery, the establishment of assembly operations, and cooperation in agriculture and food security. Investment cooperation plays a markedly greater role in relations with the Gulf countries, including projects in industry, construction, agriculture, trade and the hotel sector. Scientific, technological and educational ties are developing alongside these activities.

Latin America. This includes Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, and the entire South American continent. It is a large developing region comprising more than 30 states, with a combined population of around 668 million and a nominal GDP of approximately US\$7 trillion in 2025. Economic potential is largely concentrated in the biggest economies, primarily Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, while natural resources, agriculture and the rapidly growing domestic markets of several countries also play an important role.

Brazil has traditionally been Belarus's principal trade and economic partner in the region, above all as a major market for Belarusian potash fertilisers. **Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua** are also among its most important political and economic partners. Belarus maintains intensive political dialogue with these countries and is developing cooperation in industry, agriculture, machinery supplies, pharmaceuticals and education. Belarus retains a diplomatic presence in several key states in the region, including Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba and Argentina.

The classification used by the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not correspond to the more detailed regional divisions used in other countries. It does not account for conventionally distinguished geographical subregions, such as the Middle East. Nevertheless, this is the classification used in drafting foreign policy programme documents.

Moreover, Belarus's cooperation with the countries of the 'far arc' is fragmented and largely determined by the actual intensity of bilateral contacts rather than by a unified strategy for individual regions. This approach may complicate comparisons with the policies of other states that use different principles of regional classification. However, given that this study relies on official Belarusian sources, we follow the regional approach used by the Belarusian state sector.

In chronological terms, the following periods should be distinguished:

2020–2024 — a transitional period. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, protests following the presidential election, subsequent repression, the forced landing of a Ryanair aircraft and, later, Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, the West substantially reduced political contacts with Belarus. US and EU sanctions led to a serious decline in economic activity in this direction. The importance of the ‘far arc’ gradually increased. Alongside restoring traditional areas of cooperation after the pandemic, one objective was to enter new markets in an attempt to offset the loss of European markets in the short term.

2024–2026 — intensified engagement with the ‘far arc’ and a broader geographical scope of cooperation. This period is characterised by the establishment of contacts with promising new partners, the search for new regional footholds and an active expansion of Belarus’s presence in the countries of the ‘far arc’, largely through the redeployment of diplomats from Western postings. With no clear prospects for restoring the Western dimension of foreign policy and, importantly, economic cooperation, and with the need to preserve the traditional diversification of foreign policy amid growing economic dependence on Russia, relations with the countries of the ‘far arc’ are becoming more systematic.

According to official Belarusian sources, **455 bilateral meetings, visits and other interactions** took place between 2020 and July 2026 with **75 countries/territories** that can be classified as part of the ‘far arc’. The regional breakdown is as follows:

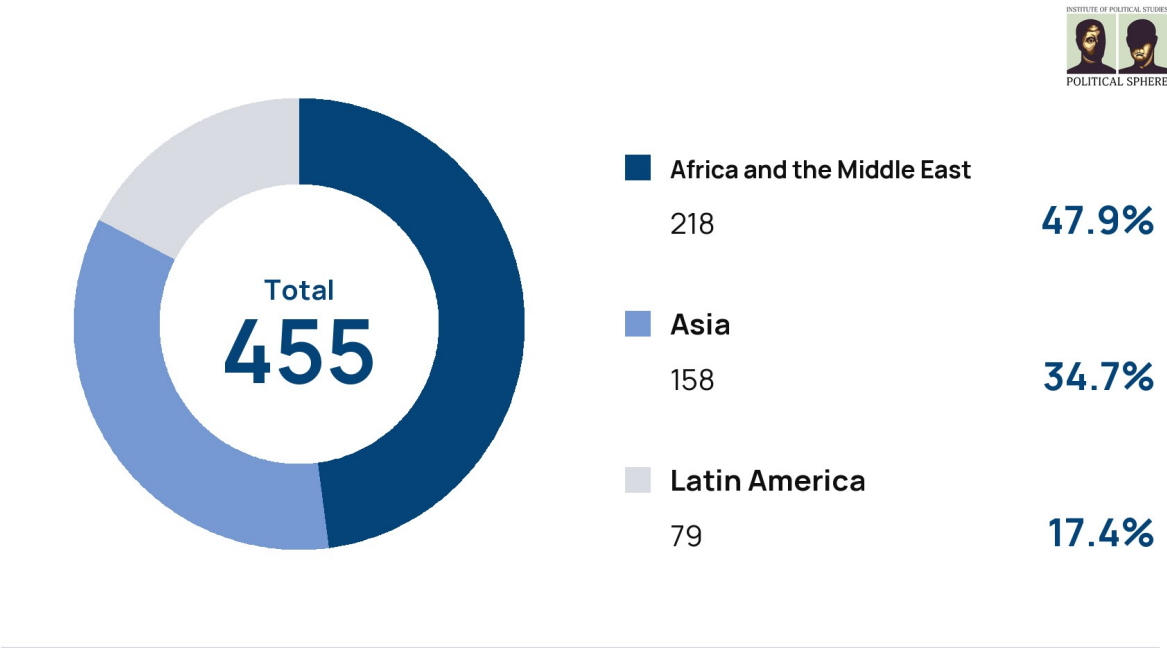


Figure 1. Events by region, 2020–2026.

The distribution of visits by individual country within each region is examined in greater detail below.

It is important to recognise that the information made publicly available by official Belarusian sources does not always accurately reflect the actual situation. An important task for both state institutions and state media is to demonstrate that Belarus is not internationally isolated and is actively pursuing an independent and effective foreign policy.

The clearest example is the economic performance of relations with the countries of the 'far arc'. Export promotion has traditionally been one of the most important aspects of Belarusian foreign policy, making export growth arguably the key measure of the Foreign Ministry's performance. Official Belarusian foreign trade statistics have not been publicly available since 2021. However, data up to 2021 clearly show that **the effort devoted to developing bilateral contacts very often fails to produce a proportionate increase in Belarusian exports.**

Belarus's export potential in the markets of the 'far arc' is also constrained by a combination of logistical, financial and structural problems:

- The high cost and complexity of logistics.
- Problems with payments and trade finance: sanctions, the reduction in Belarusian banks' correspondent relationships and the caution of foreign financial institutions complicate dollar and euro settlements, the provision of export credits and bank guarantees, and transaction insurance.
- Strong competition: in most markets of the 'far arc', Belarus competes with China, India, Turkey, EU countries, South Korea and other major suppliers, which often offer a wider product range, local production, credit financing and an extensive service network.
- A narrow export product range: Belarusian supplies to many of these countries remain concentrated in a relatively small number of categories — potash fertilisers, agricultural machinery, trucks, petrochemicals and food.
- Insufficient localisation and service infrastructure: selling complex machinery requires spare-parts warehouses, service centres, staff training, dealer networks and a permanent market presence. Establishing these requires time and substantial investment.
- Insufficient information about local markets and partners: Belarusian enterprises have traditionally been more familiar with the markets of Russia and the CIS countries. Operating in Africa, Asia or Latin America requires a different marketing strategy and a thorough understanding of the local business environment.
- Political and macroeconomic risks in individual countries: instability, currency restrictions, high public debt, foreign currency shortages and changes of political regime can lead to payment delays or the revision of previously agreed projects.

Overall, the past six years of work in this direction represent an attempt to overcome existing constraints, find new markets and use the ‘far arc’ to offset the loss of partners of exceptional importance to Belarus, at a time when the formula ‘EAEU — EU — other countries/“far arc” $\approx 1/3 : 1/3 : 1/3$ ’ has effectively ceased to function.

Asian countries

Asia combines long-established, structured partnerships with relationships whose momentum increased markedly after 2024.

In 2020–2021, the pandemic severely restricted bilateral engagement. Some contacts moved to videoconferencing, while much face-to-face diplomacy took the form of meetings at international events.

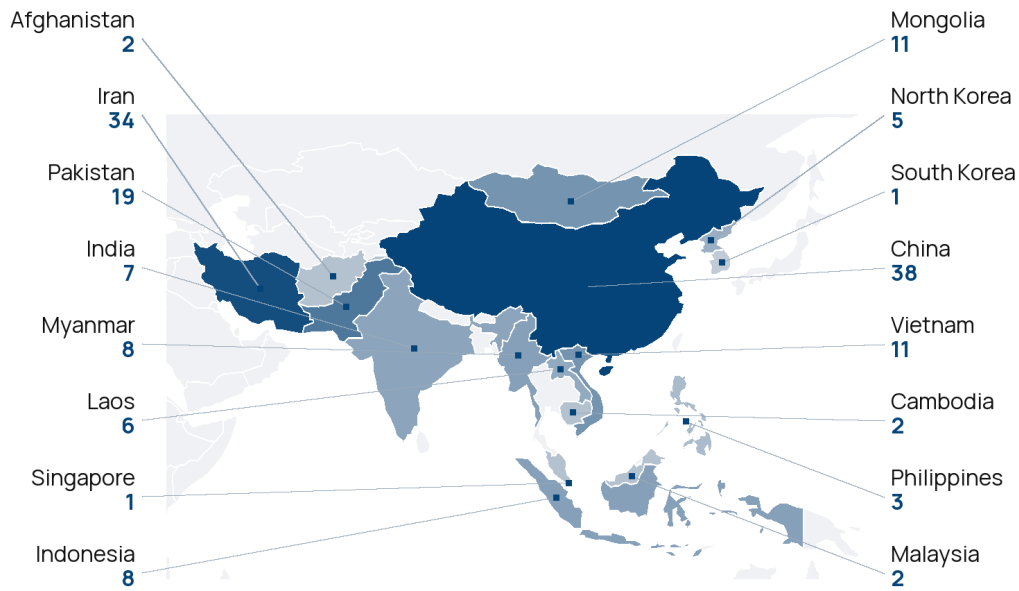
From 2022–2023 onwards, bilateral engagement with Asia acquired an increasingly pronounced economic focus. Industrial cooperation, agriculture, food security, Belarusian machinery supplies, fertilisers, pharmaceuticals, education, transport and military-technical cooperation moved to the centre of the agenda. This increased activity is directly linked to the deterioration of relations with the EU and the partial loss of Western markets.

The process accelerated after 2024. Participation expanded significantly beyond the Foreign Ministry to include the highest-ranking officials, the government, the National Assembly and sectoral ministries.

The **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**, which Belarus joined as a full member in 2024, and **BRICS**, where Belarus obtained partner-country status in 2024, have become particularly important. International events held within these organisations provide platforms for conducting a whole series of bilateral talks during a single trip.

The following mechanism for restoring active bilateral contacts emerged after the pandemic: a meeting at an international forum → a Foreign Ministry visit → reactivation of an intergovernmental commission → sectoral talks → a presidential or government visit → a roadmap and a package of agreements.

One entry = one event / contact episode



158 events
across 16 countries

Figure 2. Asia: number of events, 2020 – July 2026.

This model is most clearly illustrated by Mongolia, Indonesia, Myanmar and North Korea.

China traditionally stands out in terms of the number of visits (38 episodes, including 9 at the top level). Engagement with Iran increased significantly (34 episodes, including 9 at the level of heads of state or government), while contacts developed actively with Pakistan (19 episodes, including 7 at that level), Vietnam (11 episodes, including 2 at the top level), Mongolia (11 episodes, including 4 at the level of heads of state or government) and Indonesia (8 episodes, including 4 at that level). These countries have relatively long and well-developed histories of bilateral contacts with Belarus, making the sustained momentum in these relationships a logical outcome of previous efforts.²

The intensification of cooperation with Myanmar (8 episodes, including 4 at the top level), Laos (6 episodes, including 3 at the level of heads of state or government) and North Korea (5 episodes, including 2 at that level) is particularly noteworthy. These three

² Here and throughout, contacts at the level of heads of state or government include events in which at least one participant from either side represented the corresponding level.

relationships offer the clearest examples of expanding cooperation with Asian states and seeking new political partners and potential export markets, the latter applying more to Myanmar and Laos.

The expansion of Belarus’s network of diplomatic missions in the countries of the ‘far arc’ is another important area of activity.

In Asia, two distinct waves can be identified during the period under review. In 2021–2023, Belarus strengthened its presence primarily in major business centres:



Country	City	Mission
China	Chongqing	Consulate general
India	Mumbai	Consulate general, opened in 2022
China	Hong Kong	Consulate general, opened in 2023
Vietnam	Ho Chi Minh City	Consulate general, opened in 2023

Figure 3. Belarusian consulates general in Asia.

The rationale for opening these missions was predominantly economic: they were established in major commercial, financial and industrial centres rather than in capitals where embassies were already present.

The second wave, in 2025–2026, was associated with political ‘breakthroughs’:

- Myanmar — an agreement was reached to establish a Belarusian embassy in Myanmar and to upgrade Myanmar’s presence in Minsk from a consulate general to an embassy. Practical implementation was under way in 2026.
- North Korea — following the presidential visit in March 2026, a decision was taken to open a Belarusian embassy in Pyongyang.

At the same time, Asian partners are expanding their presence in Belarus: in 2026, Indonesia decided to open its own embassy in Minsk.

Africa and the Middle East

The combined region of Africa and the Middle East accounts for the largest number of bilateral events: **218 episodes**, or **47.9% of the total**.

One entry = one event / contact episode

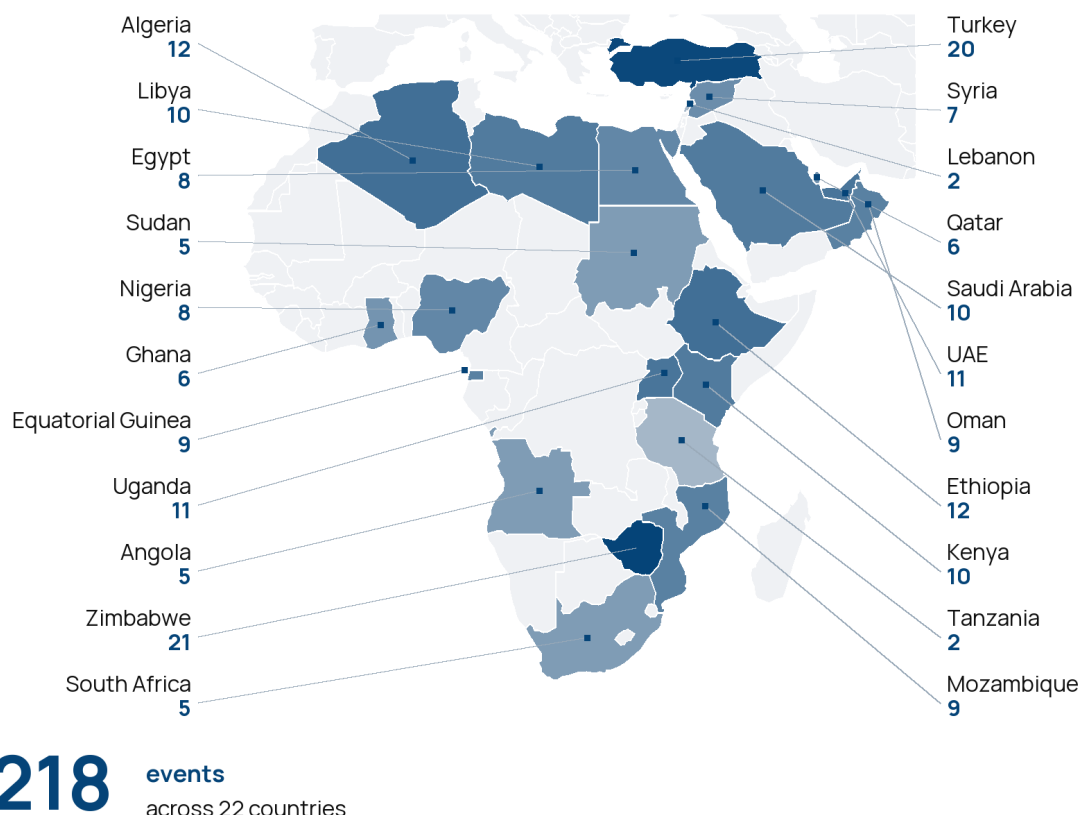


Figure 4. Africa and the Middle East: number of events, 2020 – July 2026.

Two approaches are used in this area. In Africa, the main focus is on expanding Belarus's presence. The Middle East is primarily a region in which existing political and economic ties are being deepened.

In Africa, Belarus is increasingly attempting to employ an integrated economic model: agricultural mechanisation → machinery supplies → servicing → training → export financing → possible localisation of production. In resource-rich states, mining equipment, energy and infrastructure are added to this model. In the Middle East, investment, finance, logistics, high technology and military-technical cooperation play a much greater role.

After 2024, the involvement of the prime minister and deputy prime ministers, parliament and sectoral ministries increased substantially in both Africa and the Middle East.

In the Middle East, contacts have maintained their momentum with traditional regional partners such as Turkey (20 episodes, including 2 at the top level), the UAE (11 episodes, including 7 at the level of heads of state or government), Syria (7 episodes, including 3 at that level) and Qatar (6 episodes, including 3 at that level). At the same time, engagement has intensified with relatively new partners such as Saudi Arabia (10 episodes) and Oman (9 episodes, including 4 at the top level).

Within a short period, relations with Oman progressed from relatively modest contacts to exchanges of top-level visits, the establishment of a joint committee on cooperation and investment, and the preparation of major investment projects. Belarus also views Oman as a potential transport and logistics hub providing access to the Persian Gulf and East African markets.

In Africa, a clear distinction is also apparent between traditional partners — Egypt (8 episodes, including 1 at the top level) and Nigeria (8 episodes, including 2 at the top level) — and promising new areas of engagement, including the following countries:



Country	Total number of bilateral events	At the top level (heads of state or government)
Zimbabwe	21	11
Algeria	12	4
Ethiopia	12	3
Uganda	11	2
Kenya	10	4
Mozambique	9	2
Equatorial Guinea	9	2
Tanzania	2	2

Table 1. New areas of cooperation in Africa.

Libya occupies a special place among Belarus's African partners (10 episodes, including 3 at the level of heads of state or government). Belarus and Libya have a long history of cooperation, but the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's regime and the subsequent civil war virtually brought official engagement to an end. After 2024, however, Belarusian–Libyan contacts intensified noticeably once again. Minsk is primarily building relations with the eastern Libyan political and military establishment associated with Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and the structures under his control. This is taking place against the backdrop of Libya's continuing political division, with rival centres of power operating in parallel in the west and east of the country. Engagement includes political, governmental and economic contacts. The opening of a Libyan trade mission in Minsk has added a further dimension.

Zimbabwe is Belarus's most active new partner in the entire region. It is here that an integrated model of engagement in Africa has developed most fully. Its principal aim is less to increase trade volumes than to establish footholds for a full economic presence in the country and the region. Relations develop through several channels: presidents → government → foreign ministries → parliament → agriculture → industry → defence. Agricultural mechanisation has become the main economic project.

Algeria and Ghana are examples of newer areas of engagement where Belarusian activity increased in 2025–2026. Relations with these countries moved very quickly from interagency cooperation to top-level contacts. In a comparatively short period, engagement expanded beyond predominantly technical and sectoral issues and acquired a higher political status, including meetings between heads of state.

Several developments illustrate the expansion of Belarus's diplomatic presence in Africa and the Middle East. In 2022, Belarus opened an embassy in Zimbabwe. In 2023, Zimbabwe opened an embassy in Minsk, demonstrating mutual interest and enabling systematic work across all areas of cooperation.

In Equatorial Guinea, 9 bilateral events were recorded during the period under review, including 2 top-level visits. In 2023, following top-level contacts between Belarus and Equatorial Guinea, a decision was taken to open a Belarusian embassy there. The opening of an Equatorial Guinean embassy in Minsk was discussed at the same time. These agreements were ultimately not implemented, and in June 2026 the Belarusian Foreign Ministry adopted a resolution closing the 'embassy project' in Malabo.³

During talks between Aliaksandr Lukashenka and Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of Oman, an agreement was reached to open embassies reciprocally in Muscat and Minsk. Practical implementation began in 2026.

A Libyan trade mission opened in Minsk in 2025. Although a trade mission is not a diplomatic mission — Libya's embassy has operated in Minsk since 2001 — this is an important development in bilateral contacts. In June 2026, during the Ghanaian

³ https://news.zerkalo.io/economics/130410.html#google_vignette

president's visit to Belarus, the two sides supported the idea of reciprocal embassy openings.

Latin America

Latin America accounts for **79 events**, or **17.4% of the total**. Almost all activity is concentrated in a fairly small group of states. Just three countries — Cuba (22 episodes, including 7 at the level of heads of state or government), Nicaragua (18 episodes, including 3 at that level) and Venezuela (15 episodes, including 2 at the top level) — account for 55 events, or approximately 70% of all activity in Latin America.

Adding Brazil (7 episodes), Mexico (4) and Colombia (4), the six leading countries account for almost 90% of all events in the region.

One entry = one event / contact episode



79 events
across 13 countries

Figure 5. Latin America: number of events, 2020 – July 2026.

Cuba is Belarus's most active partner in Latin America. It is the only country in the region where the density of institutional channels is comparable to that of key Asian or African

partners. Several levels are involved simultaneously: presidents → prime ministers and deputy prime ministers → foreign ministries → the intergovernmental commission → defence ministries → sectoral ministries. The year 2024 was particularly busy, with visits by Cuba's defence minister, chief of the General Staff and deputy prime minister, a visit by the Belarusian prime minister, and several contacts between the foreign ministries. In 2025, presidential meetings, another session of the intergovernmental commission and an official visit by Miguel Díaz-Canel to Belarus took place.

Cooperation with Nicaragua grew particularly noticeably in 2024–2025. In 2024, a Belarusian delegation's visit was followed by an official visit by Prime Minister Raman Halouchenka. In 2025, the intergovernmental commission continued its work, alongside foreign ministry consultations and reciprocal visits. The principal change is a gradual shift from predominantly political affinity towards more practical issues in transport, agriculture, infrastructure and lending.

Venezuela remains a traditionally important partner for Belarus. However, owing to the country's domestic political situation, the intensity of contacts is far below the peak reached during Hugo Chávez's presidency.

In cooperation with Brazil, a substantial proportion of contacts are associated with BRICS and international parliamentary events. In 2025, Brazil became one of the principal venues for Belarusian multilateral diplomacy, and Maksim Ryzhankou's trip to Rio de Janeiro was used for numerous bilateral contacts. Brazil's role is therefore considerably greater than the number of specifically Belarusian–Brazilian events alone might suggest.

Relations with Mexico and Colombia are characterised mainly by the development of parliamentary contacts. Friendship groups and contacts between parliamentarians serve as an important channel for developing relations where executive-level diplomacy remains relatively limited.

Changes in Belarus's diplomatic presence in Latin America between 2020 and July 2026 were much smaller in scale than in other regions. The principal development was the opening of a Belarusian embassy in Bogotá in 2021, while the mission in Ecuador was closed. In Latin America, therefore, resources have essentially been transferred from one country to another.

Conclusion

Engagement with the countries of the 'far arc' intensified noticeably in 2020–2026, but the uneven distribution of resources and attention across regions is clear. Asia has seen deeper strategic partnerships and rapid growth in new areas of cooperation. In Africa, new relationships with Zimbabwe, Ghana and Algeria are also developing actively alongside traditional partnerships. Latin America, by contrast, remains an 'underexplored' region where only a handful of traditional, long-standing partners are of practical significance.

Belarus's diplomatic presence in the 'far arc' also expanded considerably after 2020. This was largely made possible by the release of resources from Western postings: deteriorating relations led to a substantial reduction in Belarus's diplomatic presence in both the EU and North America. Yet the same unevenness is evident here as in the pattern of bilateral contacts. In Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the number of missions abroad is growing, not only in capitals but also in regional economic centres. In Latin America, changes are limited to the 'relocation' of the embassy from Ecuador to Colombia.

Although the importance of Asian, African and Latin American countries as potential economic partners has grown markedly, Belarus has been unable over the past six years to overcome the systemic problems discussed above, which directly affect the effectiveness of economic ties. Expensive logistics, difficulties with payments and financing, strong competition, a narrow product range, insufficient localisation, and the political and economic risks of individual markets continue to severely constrain Belarusian exports. This is reflected in the extremely limited information on specific bilateral projects in the materials examined, and the even scarcer data on bilateral trade volumes, contract values and other quantitative indicators normally used in official Belarusian rhetoric to demonstrate results.

The main outcome of engagement with the countries of the 'far arc' in 2020–2026 appears to be, above all, an attempt to create a new infrastructure of external relations and expand Belarus's geographical presence. The effectiveness of these efforts can be assessed only by whether political contacts and agreements translate into sustained exports, completed investment projects and a long-term presence of Belarusian enterprises in these markets. At this stage, we can speak only of the existing potential for cooperation, as the outcomes of Belarusian foreign policy towards the 'far arc' in 2020–2026 clearly lack concrete results.

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