

## SA, Belarus build bilateral ties

PRETORIA: South African officials met with a Belarus delegation on Friday, 12 September, to review bilateral relations, with both sides having agreed on the importance of building a mutually beneficial partnership that contributes to the advancement of national and regional development priorities.



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The meeting, which was co-chaired by Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane and her Belarusian counterpart Vladimir Makei also reviewed progress in trade and economic relations, as well as cooperation education, agriculture and rural development.

"We renewed our continued support for the strengthening of economic and commercial relations and technical cooperation especially in the automotive, capital equipment, agriculture and agro-processing sectors under the umbrella of the South Africa-Belarus Intergovernmental Committee of Trade and Economic Cooperation," Minister Nkoana-Mashabane said at a joint media briefing after the meeting.

The two countries, however, noted that they have not yet maximised their bilateral trade and economic cooperation opportunities.

"There is big room to grow the volume of our two-way trade, and create a more diversified and higher value-added trade portfolio," said Minister Nkoana-Mashabane.

She said they agreed to closer cooperation and exchange of information on policy and regulatory issues, trade and investment opportunities. Exchanges of business delegations would also facilitate an improvement in economic and commercial relations.

Total trade between South Africa and Belarus, Ukraine's northern neighbour, has recorded an increase between 2009 and 2013 from R42 million to R253 million.

With regard to cooperation in agriculture, Minister Nkoana-Mashabane and Makei discussed the importance of expediting the finalisation of the agriculture cooperation agreement that is currently under consideration.

The two sides are of the view that the agreement will be key in establishing a solid foundation for focused and programmatic cooperation in the agriculture sector.

The two countries also said they will continue to strengthen cooperation in education and skills development, including facilitating strong institutional partnerships, academic exchanges, scholarships and apprenticeships in key priority areas of agricultural sciences and research, engineering, forestry, and vocational and technical training.

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