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EU Lifts Majority of Belarus Sanctions

On Feb. 15, 2016, European Union (EU) foreign ministers met in Brussels and agreed to permanently lift most EU sanctions against Belarus. The unanimous decision, effective March 1, 2016, will result in the termination of travel bans and asset freezes currently in place against 170 Belarusian individuals, including the president of Belarus. The decision also lifts sanctions against three Belarusian entities, specifically:

- > Beltech Holding;
- > Beltechexport; and
- > Spetsprioborservice.

The European Council's announcement of the decision came just as a temporary fourth-month suspension of the EU sanctions against Belarus was due to expire at the end of February. The EU decision comes after the Oct. 29, 2015, issuance of a U.S. general license authorizing U.S. persons to engage in transactions with nine Belarusian entities named on the Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) list administered by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). Together, the decisions signal a marked improvement in relations between Belarus and the EU and United States.

Despite these recent developments, certain limited EU sanctions against Belarus remain in place. Concurrent with its decision to lift most Belarus-related sanctions, the EU agreed both to maintain its sanctions against four Belarusian individuals, and to extend the EU arms embargo against Belarus for a period of 12 months. As a result, individuals and entities proposing to engage in transactions with Belarus should continue to consult their trade council to ensure their proposed business activities do not trigger a licensing requirement.

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