

Thirteen is quite an appropriate figure for continuing discussions

By Victor Mikhailov

The 13th Minsk Forum has been held in a constructive atmosphere, as part of a joint German-Belarusian project primarily tackling relations between our two states. As a rule, such discussions usually cover pan-European problems and this year was no exception, being named *Belarus and the European Union after Crisis: Challenges and Opportunities in Politics, Economy and Society*.

The issue is acute for Belarus, since we have set ourselves the ambitious task of achieving a European level of prosperity. The experience of a developed country, such as Germany, may prove very useful. Belarus can learn from German political experience, notes the Head of the Presidential Administration, Vladimir Makei. He recalls the idea of 'everyone's prosperity' — as developed by the well-known economist and former Federal Chancellor of Germany, Ludwig Erhard — calling it a key aspect of the presidential election campaign in Belarus and of Belarusian strategy overall.

The Forum has always been an open venue for dialogue on



Minsk Forum is an open site for dialogue on European integration issues

topical issues and the current event has taken place during an important political period — a fact which can hardly go unnoticed. It is 65 years since the end of WWII, with Germany recently celebrating the 20th anniversary of its reunification. "Unlike borders on a map, we cannot separate divides in human consciousness overnight. Germany is united today and so should be Europe. We share common values and a common future. We must understand this, coming to this understanding consciously," stresses Mr. Makei.

Much was spoken at the

event of the 'economisation' of relations. The Belarusian economy is going through a special period of structural reform, which will only be possible if new investments, technologies and advanced experience are provided. German partners possess all these and their assistance could be significant. Belarus has overcome the global economic crisis with help from foreign partners. However, according to Mr. Makei, despite our two sides learning how to deal with financial and economic problems jointly, it can be hard to break away from old, negative stereotypes. Mr.

Makei notes that isolation and sanctions remain, but emphasises, "It's important to focus on realising the huge potential of the Belarus-EU relationship, rather than allocating blame for lost opportunities."

Evidently, Belarus has the right to expect more decisive steps from the EU; Schengen visas were compared with the Berlin Wall at the Forum. The 'Schengen Wall' is virtual, yet tangible, and should be removed to aid European integration. A 'wait-and-see approach' is inappropriate. Without Belarus, and other Eastern European states yet to join the Schengen zone,

the configuration of contemporary Europe is incomplete.

European politicians hope to see more active co-operation with Belarus, as noted by Ronald Pofalla, a German Bundestag deputy, the Head of the Federal Chancellery and Federal Minister for Special Tasks. He spoke of the necessity of building positive partnership relations between Belarus and the EU, noting that Belarus will benefit from a stronger partnership with the EU. He believes that high political level contacts, recently set up, will support such partnerships and is certain that the EU is ready

for major collaboration with sovereign Belarus. The German official sees the forthcoming presidential elections in Belarus as a 'touchstone' and is pleased by the more open atmosphere of the election campaign. He praises the fact that the country has invited international observers and has taken into account OSCE recommendations regarding electoral legislation.

The Forum brought together around 500 representatives from political, economic and social spheres, from Belarus, Germany and a range of other European states. The economy was a major topic but the discussions also covered humanitarian issues.

Speaking of Belarus-EU liaisons, the Chairman of the Minsk Forum, Rainer Lindner, stressed that it's unwise to say that most issues depend on the forthcoming elections in Belarus. He advocates reduced visa costs for citizens on both sides. Regional collaboration was a major political topic of the event. Interestingly, a new Belarusian-German dictionary has been released, testifying to the long-term prospects for mutual collaboration between our two European countries.

Turning point for rapprochement process

By Tatiana Vlasova

Minsk's Council of Europe Information Point, operational for over a year, is unprecedented

No other non-member of the Council of Europe is honoured with a similar representation office. Andrea Rigoni, PACE Rapporteur for Belarus, has called it a 'turning point' in the process of rapprochement between the EU and Minsk. Igor Gorsky, the Director of the Council of Europe Information Point in Belarus, notes that the centre has already achieved much, with further plans afoot.

All projects are agreed with the Council of Europe, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry and the Belarusian State University, since the Information Point operates as part of an international technical assistance project, implemented jointly with the BSU.

During recent months, four information campaigns have been organised in Belarus, tackling topical issues: domestic violence towards women; the protection of child rights; race discrimination; and the moratorium on the death penalty (with pos-



Council of Europe attracts visitors

sible complete abolition).

Contemporary TV clips to advertise the issues have been broadcast across Council of Europe countries, with most also seen by TV viewers in Belarus, being shown on many Belarusian channels. Additionally, campaigns are running via the press and Internet.

The Council of Europe Information Point targets various audiences, with special attention given to young people, students and the upcoming generation. The Information Point is working jointly with Belarusian ministries to organise diverse events and visits by Council of Europe representatives.

Various events are scheduled for the near future, including an exhibition dedicated to the abolition of the death penalty. Council of Europe countries have taken part in a poster contest, entitled *Poster4 Tomorrow*, with over 2,000 entries; the most interesting have been sent to Minsk for display. Two more information campaigns are planned: one concerning child rights and safety on the Internet and the other dedicated to human trafficking. Belarus is known to be doing much to eradicate this evil and, undoubtedly, Minsk and the Council of Europe could achieve a great deal by their joint efforts.

Towards long-term prosperity

Belarus outranks Russia and Ukraine in Legatum Prosperity Index

Belarus was ranked 54th in the 2010 Legatum Prosperity Index, outranking Russia (63rd) and Ukraine (69th).

The Legatum Prosperity

Index is an annual ranking of countries' prosperity, published by the British Legatum Institute (an independent scientific research institution) jointly with Oxford Analytica and Gallup World Poll Service analytical centres. Unlike

other similar surveys, which rely solely on the prompt data, the Legatum Prosperity Index assesses factors of prosperity from the point of view of their influence on economic growth and long-term population welfare.

Concrete proposals for development of capital

By Andrey Ivantsov

Minsk to use experience of large cities from around globe

The Director of the Minsk Scientific-Research Institute of Social-Economic Problems, Ivan Matkevich, has told journalists about the results of the international scientific-practical conference: *Resources of Large Cities are Resources of Social-Economic Development for a Region and a Country*. He stressed, "The event gathered representatives from over ten countries. This means that the issue of large cities' development is of concern not only to Belarus but to many other states. The arrival of guests and their active participation in the conference, alongside speeches by do-



Urban challenges also shared by Minsk

mestic scientists and practical workers, enable us to use accumulated experience to successfully develop the Belarusian capital. It's interesting to know how Vienna, Ankara and Kiev work in this field."

The conference has elaborated proposals for Minsk's development. In particular, recommendations were prepared for the City Executive

Committee, which is tasked with attracting investments. Prospects for small and medium-sized businesses were discussed, as was the issue of how to improve local government. It was decided that a collection of conference materials will be published. All proposed recommendations are to be studied and analysed, with concrete action taken in future.