

# Integration presupposes three-sided rapprochement

Minsk hosts Belarus-Russia Union State Council of Ministers meeting and that of EurAsEC's Interstate Council

By Vladimir Vasiliev

The events have cumbersome names but a simple idea: to promote mutual relations between Minsk, Moscow and Astana. Clearly, time and circumstance inspire our rapprochement. The dramatic and almost inexplicable events seen in North Africa and the Japanese disaster (which has affected one of the largest global economies) confirm that our world order is fragile and vulnerable. It seems logical to discuss the integration of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan in tranquil Minsk.

Speaking of prospects for Belarus-Kazakhstan co-operation, Alexander Lukashenko, firstly, noted that Belarus is realising over 30 projects relating to Kazakhstan's industrialisation; meanwhile, collaboration continues. "You have what we need, while we have what Kazakhstan needs. Prices are much lower than those seen globally so I think we'll agree," he stressed. Journalists at the meeting took note of the President's remark that Belarus 'has 100 percent fulfilled its obligations regarding the Single Economic Space's establishment and within the scheduled time'. It was pronounced convincingly, so journalists clearly understood that no problems are expected from Minsk: at present or in the future.

Mr. Lukashenko's meeting with Vladimir Putin began by tackling the situation at the Japanese Fukushima-1 nuclear power plant. The topic was not originally on the agenda but clearly needed to be mentioned. Belarus is to build its own nuclear power plant in the Grodno Region so the nuclear tragedy in Japan cannot be ignored. Mr. Putin expressed his views in a business-like manner and in much detail, noting that 'American 40 year old reactors



President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko meets Prime Minister of Russia Vladimir Putin, in Minsk

operate in Japan. Russian developers plan to use new generation technologies, whose safety is much higher than that seen at Fukushima-1. Moreover, the Grodno Region's seismological environment differs drastically from that of the Japanese islands, which regularly experience tremors.

The Belarusian President and the Russian Prime Minister chatted for over two hours, discussing not only the nuclear reactor. Belarusian-Russian relations were high on the agenda, viewed in relation to the Single Eco-

conomic Space. Mr. Lukashenko spoke of Minsk's readiness to 'work operatively' and especially stressed that our bilateral economic relations are constructive, developing dynamically. Mr. Putin agreed, mentioning an interesting fact, which was quickly recorded by journalists. The Russian Prime Minister said that 'our trade turnover has risen by 19 percent, to reach \$28.5bn'. Afterwards, he added, "On the whole, it seems that our trade-economic relations, and other spheres, are developing sustainably."

The National Library hosted the Belarus-Russia Union State Council of Ministers meeting and that of the Eurasian Economic Community's Interstate Council. Judging by the number and level of signed documents, it seems that the creation of our Union State is being undertaken without criticism. Our prime ministers signed a range of agreements: on the construction of a nuclear power plant; on measures to ensure the parallel operation of our energy systems; and on research collaboration, including space projects.

Commenting upon the signed documents, Belarusian PM Mikhail Myasnikov stressed that it's sadly yet impossible to speak of a fully-fledged Union State. He has proposed the launch of certain programmes in the fields of micro-electronics, nanotechnologies and military-technology, among others, to which Mr. Putin has agreed.

Journalists were much interested in talks regarding the supply of hydrocarbons in 2011, with Belarus to receive 21.7m tonnes of oil and 22.5bn cubic metres of gas. The gas agreement expires this year, so interesting talks between Beltransgas and Gazprom seem likely. There is no doubt that these will not be easy but no sensation is expected, as the Single Economic Space and the Customs Union are already a reality. We can surely look to the future with optimism.

During the Eurasian Economic Community's Interstate Council meeting, high ranking experts discussed important technical issues, such as the transition of customs and other types of control to the external borders of the Customs Union. In short, this will create favourable conditions for the free movement of goods through Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan. Problems relating to customs offices sharing information were also discussed, alongside veterinary and phyto-sanitary services. As Mikhail Gorbachev once said, 'the process continues'.

Journalists from our three states were greatly impressed by the Minsk meetings. It is quite different to see with one's own eyes than to read abstract speculations by self-made 'analysts'. The heads of the three largest Eurasian states are firmly and successfully moving towards a common goal.

## Investors arriving from UK and Ireland have good intentions

By Vitaly Volyanyuk

Minsk has hosted negotiations with British and Irish businessmen from various business segments, underlining the attractiveness of the Belarusian market for investments

On welcoming his guests, Alexander Lukashenko stressed that stability and predictability are vital for business in any country. According to him, Belarus boasts both advantages.

David Faktor, Managing Director and co-owner of Stemcor Holdings Limited, which specialises in steel sales, is already certain that Belarus has a good climate for injections. "We've found honesty and reliability here," he notes. Vincent Pierce, the Executive Director and owner of Lau-



Businessmen receive affirmation of support

company has been working in Belarus for 20 years and that 'he has never doubted recommending Belarus to other partners as a place for business. "I'm glad to say that we don't have any problems."

Belarus has done its best to assure investors of state support. The British and Irish business representatives have been invited to take part in the privatisation of open joint stock companies (shares in 180 enterprises are to be sold this year).

"If you aspire to take part in this process, you're welcome," noted Mr. Lukashenko, inviting co-operation. He added that he also welcomes the creation of new manufacturing facilities. "There's a 'green light' for you here," he said.

Speaking of investment into new manufacturing sites, he stressed that, in launching a project in Belarus, close to the EU border, investors simultaneously receive access to the 170m market of the Customs

Union of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan.

"We'll do everything we can on our side to enable you to launch production in Belarus within six months, or by the end of the year at the latest," Mr. Lukashenko emphasised, adding that he expects a reciprocal business-like character and efficiency from these business partners.

The foreign guests noted that they are keen to implement several serious projects in Belarus, in various spheres: the extraction and sale of potash fertilisers; the modernisation of Belarusian cement factories; the recycling of sugar production waste; and the extraction and processing of sapropels. They were assured that Belarus is interested in all the above mentioned areas and is open to collaboration with British and Irish business circles.

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