

New association could become centre of influence

By Larisa Rakovskaya

Conference of business circles from Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan, held in Moscow, tackles how best to smooth path 'from the Customs Union to Single Economic Space'

The participants of the conference, which brought together famous economists, businessmen and representatives of three ministries, shared their experience of how to master the new economic conditions created by

the Customs Union. The prime ministers of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan attended, significantly raising the level of the meeting and allowing trilateral negotiations.

Much was spoken of the healthy competitive environment for business on the Customs Union market. In his speech, Belarusian Prime Minister Mikhail Myasnikov noted that Minsk is keen to see manufacturers enjoy equal conditions within the Customs Union. At present, price disparity is reducing the com-

petitiveness of some countries' goods against those of others, which enjoy effective subsidisation. He asserts that transnational alliances within the Customs Union are vital to enhance the competitiveness of commodities from our three states on foreign markets "This will make our three countries less dependent on the foreign market situation, while ensuring sustainable development for industry, science and services," he underlines.

The setting up of transnational



Three-lateral talks in Moscow

corporations will allow the Customs Union to become a centre of economic power on the world arena. This is a matter of the future. So far, Mr. Myasnikov has invited Rus-

sian and Kazakh businessmen to participate more actively in privatising Belarusian enterprises, primarily those from the petrochemical sphere.

Happiness Rating still interesting, even despite respondents' subjectivism

By Alexey Borisovsky

Answering the question as to what we need to ensure happiness, some list material assets. Others are laconic and brief. According to psychologists, each person's needs and demands differ. The results of a recent survey are rather interesting, showing which aspects of life citizens are pleased with and showing the correctness of the state's socio-economic policy.

The National Statistical Committee has conducted a survey, studying Belarusian attitudes towards living conditions as part of its traditional investigation of households. It aims to better understand public perceptions of well-being, so that they might be better met, with around 6,000 families polled countrywide. Questions were divided into three sections: satisfaction with living conditions; the availability of social infrastructure; and the quality of medical services.

The results showed that two thirds of households are satisfied with their living conditions, although residents primarily wish to enjoy more living space. A similar picture is seen regarding medical services, with 73 percent of the population satisfied with the quality of health care provided by state organisations. Moreover, about a third of all residents have benefitted from non-state healthcare organisations' services. Most mentioned their satisfaction with the quality of care rendered.



Queues and a lack of necessary specialists at polyclinics and hospitals were given as reasons for complaint, while the high cost of medical services at non-state healthcare organisations was mentioned by 85 percent of those surveyed as the major reason for their inaccessibility. According to the National Statistical Committee, total satisfaction with the quality of medical services countrywide

is characterised by subjective assessments.

Meanwhile, many Belarusians are unable to walk to their nearest shops, since major social infrastructure sites tend to be located 30 minutes away. Retail trade and public catering outlets tend to be most closely located, reachable within 15 minutes on foot.

Overall, rural residents are more satisfied with their living

Happiness often seen on faces conditions than urbanities. Belarusians' satisfaction is also evinced by the Gallup Happiness Rating, where our country is placed 57th among 124 nations. Approximately 57 percent of Belarusian residents note that their needs are primarily satisfied, with around 26 percent indicating that they struggle to fulfil their needs; 17 percent say that they need something more for happiness.

Meeting high international standards

Report on fulfilling international commitments in regard to education presented in Geneva

Belarus' Education Minister, Sergei Maskevich, has presented a national report — *Implementing Internationally Agreed Goals and Commitments in Regard to Education* — at a high level substantive

session of the UN's Economic and Social Council, held in Geneva. The report focuses on the national policy of Belarus in the field of education, including the country's implementation of its international commitments — as set out in the Millennium Development Goals adopted at the UN Summit in 2000.

Various aspects of educational

processes in Belarus were tackled, with Mr. Maskevich answering questions regarding the goals and objectives of the country's current Education Code — including pre-school enrolment, development of vocational education and higher learning. Belarus' educational plans and policies are forward-looking, focusing on further integration

into the international educational system, including the Bologna Process.

The presentation of the national report at such a high and representative international meeting allows Belarus to emphasise the compliance of its national education policy with the highest international standards.

Desire to transport cargo independently

Belarus views Turkey as main partner to develop merchant fleet

Belarus' Transport and Communications Minister, Ivan Shcherbo, notes that we are currently discussing various forms of co-operation, including leasing and purchasing Turkish vessels. The Transport and Communications Ministry is building a regulatory framework to define the development of Belarus' merchant fleet. "We'll soon complete a draft decree, which will eventually determine the privileges connected with the development of the merchant fleet," Mr. Shcherbo stresses.

Belarus has already set up a navigation company, Belmorflot, with the assistance of a major corporation — Zepter Group. Belmorflot transports freight via leased ships. "The development of our own fleet is not easy, as we need not only to rent or buy vessels but ensure the security of freight transportation. When a vessel puts to sea, the state bears responsibility. It is essential to co-ordinate all issues," the official adds.

Roubles primarily deposited at banks

In June, citizens' deposits in the national currency rose by almost Br1 trillion

According to the National Bank, as of early July, the total volume of Belarusian Roubles deposited at the country's financial institutions stood at Br10 trillion (almost the same amount as in early May).

Deposits in foreign currencies face a different situation. In June, their number continued falling but, as specialists note, the situation then stabilised, with deposits appearing to rise through early July. In May, deposits in foreign currencies fell by \$469m (in equivalent). In June, the fall totalled \$240m, resulting in Belarusian banks holding almost \$3.5bn in equivalent by July.

In early July, Rouble and foreign currency deposits (calculated in the national currency) exceeded Br27 trillion.