



Heads of six countries gather for informal summit of CSTO member states' leaders: Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan

# Serious talks during meeting 'without ties' by six states' heads

By Vladimir Vasiliev

It's known that no decisions are taken during informal summits and no documents are signed. Even the dress code is more casual. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev arrived in a tie but, on seeing his colleagues, immediately removed it, to the flash of cameras. Despite the relaxed atmosphere of the event, Alexander Lukashenko viewed the meeting as being significant. He noted that such summits 'give heads of state the chance to exchange opinions and synchronise their watches on burning issues of international security'.

Events in North Africa and the Middle East were a major topic, as the wave of anti-governmental action flooding Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria requires serious debate, conclusions and adequate steps. Of course, we should not simplify the reasons behind these southern 'revolutions', which have been accumulating for decades. According to the Belarusian delegation, recent events are the result of growing social stratification within society and high levels of political corruption and wrangling. However, Minsk is also convinced that, regardless of

internal reasons, there has been external direction...

The wide use of contemporary communications and the Internet by Arab 'revolutionaries' is an aspect which, according to Belarus, requires special study, since these are turning into a powerful instrument of political struggle. Opening the summit, President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev stressed that information security is of acute importance to every CSTO state.

The interest in Middle Eastern events is easily explained, since geographical distances mean little in our modern global world; events in the Middle East and Maghreb can easily have a negative influence on the zone of CSTO responsibility. The CSTO Secretariat notes that terrorist structures are now active in the Central Asian region. Supporters of radical Islam are growing in strength, as are those promoting extremist views. Drug trafficking, which helps finance terrorist and extremist groups, continues to extend and armed Afghan gangs could soon be seen along the border areas of Central Asian countries such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (which are CSTO member states).

Judging by local newspa-

pers, such trends are arousing concern in Kazakhstan. Belarus is also affected, although not yet directly. On the eve of the Astana meeting, Mr. Lukashenko noted, "It's no secret that the whole Muslim world is boiling, so we can't exclude that difficulties may appear in our Muslim states, primarily in Tajikistan; problems also exist in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan is also being 'heated' from all sides."

## Alexander Lukashenko:

*We've unanimously announced that we'll take a range of steps this year, enabling us to enhance the role of the organisation. We'll endeavour to strengthen the CSTO and will do so. This reinforcement will see important steps made in the near future.*

Kazakhstan is Belarus' partner within the CSTO and a member of the Customs Union and future Single Economic Space. No borders exist between our states, so Minsk is keen to see stability across the whole Central Asian region. As to how this can be assured, Mr. Lukashenko believes that the CSTO should be transformed from a consultative-advisory body into a fully-fledged military-political bloc. Minsk believes that the organisation should be able to promptly and efficiently respond to challenges and threats from outside

and inside CSTO member states. At present, it lacks such power. Kazakh *Liter* newspaper notes that, when ethnic brawls broke out in Kyrgyzstan a year ago, 'the CSTO headquarters made a helpless gesture, merely observing events'. According to its charter, the organisation has no right to interfere in the internal affairs of fellow member states unless it receives an official appeal. However, because of delays

and uncertainty, around 500 people died in Kyrgyzstan and several thousand were forced to flee their homes. Evidently, the CSTO needs a clear plan of action for such cases, to allow it to provide urgent assistance to member countries without violating national sovereignty.

The talks in Astana should help guide future official decisions. Evidently, if the CSTO wants to

transform from a consultative venue into an efficient organisation, serious political will from member states is needed. As journalists note, political contradictions exist between CSTO member states at present, as widely discussed behind closed doors at Zheruiyk Hall.

After the meeting, Mr. Lukashenko, currently chairing the CSTO, told journalists that he and his colleagues 'have tackled the work of the CSTO critically, noting a range of drawbacks, including internal shortages'. The Belarusian President added, "We've unanimously announced that we'll take a range of steps this year, enabling us to enhance the role of the organisation. We'll endeavour to strengthen the CSTO and will do so. This reinforcement will see important steps made in the near future."

Equipping the CSTO's

collective rapid response force will be one of the first steps. Mr. Lukashenko explained, "We've agreed that we'll elaborate a plan on how to jointly counteract threats, primarily regarding information and cyber space."

The participants of the summit analysed recently signed legislative documents relating to CSTO activity and announced that, by December (when the CSTO official summit is to be held) all will have been ratified. Mr. Lukashenko underlined that Belarus has already completed this task, leaving its CSTO partners to follow.

The summit in Astana should seriously inspire further CSTO activity. World events push our states towards deeper military-political collaboration. However, time will show whether today's announcements take definite form.

## Everything meets European standards

By Vladimir Stepanov

### Modern checkpoint at Geraneny ensures comfortable crossing of Belarus-EU border

The checkpoint has been launched at the Lida border guard section, now open full time (having been open previously only at weekends and used mostly by Lithua-

nians and Belarusians visiting relatives or cemeteries). The old, 1990s checkpoint is now transformed; its two storey building is equipped with modern telecommunication and engineering networks and a video surveillance system, with six flats available for officers and their families, in addition to garages and a dog breeding centre.

The Belarusian State Border Committee is convinced that the checkpoint will meet European standards and will prove popular once an agreement on localised border movement with Lithuania comes into force. The new checkpoint will reduce queues, while its location helps border guards promptly react to challenges.

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