

On fate and prospects for integration

Vladimir Putin recently published an article about the problems and prospects of integration affecting the post-Soviet space, in *Izvestia* newspaper. Russia's Prime Minister speculated about a range of acute problems, particularly, about our possible Eurasian Union. Mr. Putin's article evoked a huge response. During a recent meeting with Russian journalists, Alexander Lukashenko noted that

he has also prepared an article for *Izvestia*, giving his opinion on the integration of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan.

We cite the beginning of this article, written by the President of Belarus: 'Today we're on the verge of creating a completely new integration unity. From January 1st, 2012, the Single Economic Space of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan will appear de jure and

de facto. Accordingly, it is time to talk about the main thing: the life of our people in the future, the fate of our states, interaction prospects, the way the world works around us and our place in the sun. V.V. Putin's article in *Izvestia* tackled all these issues.

Without intending it as a compliment to my colleague, the former Russian President and current Prime Minister, I must

say that this publication is a real event. For the first time, Russia has clearly and unambiguously stated its priorities for relations with its former Soviet brother countries, who once shared the 'greatcoat'. This isn't a superficial slogan; it penetrates the depth of life shared by our countries and peoples.

To my mind, it's the first time in the history of contemporary

Russia that this has been spoken of by the candidate for Russian presidency. As I understand, it is part of his pre-election foreign policy programme. Clearly, Russia, as a major power, can't and won't ignore work with other unions, as is natural. However, the priorities are a fundamentally different matter. This stands high. The words of the article are a real strategy — a correct strategy.'

Barrier free medium to yield benefits to all parties

Commonwealth signs free trade zone agreement

By Irina Yeliseeva

The document has endured a long and complicated journey: a whole decade of debate by CIS member states. Agreeing the details has been a challenge, so its recent signing in St. Petersburg is a true surprise to many.

Back in 1994, when all our post-Soviet states were badly in need of a free trade agreement, one was signed. However, it never worked efficiently, as many failed to ratify it. A new draft remained idle until 2009 but, in 2010, the process of its co-ordination began to move quickly. The crisis inspired integration talks and, this March, a free trade zone agreement was studied by our prime ministers at a Minsk summit. It was perhaps the largest and most acute discussion, with each country keen to protect its own interests. Some positions were utterly contradictory and consensus seemed impossible; accordingly, when the signing of an agreement was announced in September, few believed the news.

Some details are yet to be ironed out of course. Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are still to sign the document, deciding to postpone until late 2011. Meanwhile, those who have signed need to lift all barriers and restrictions to trade as soon as



Co-ordinated decisions taken at session of CIS Heads of Government in St. Petersburg

possible (abolishing a range of import and export duties). Some products are not yet covered by the agreement, so these exemptions will be the subject of future talks.

Many wonder how the CIS free trade zone will function, since the Customs Union operates within it. The Customs Union Commission Executive Secretary, Sergey Glaziev, explains, "We've shifted from one-sided agreements, which were burdened

with numerous exemptions and which have failed to create common framework conditions for free trade. Rather, we seek a fully-fledged multi-sided agreement. We have absolutely no obstacles to its realisation within the Customs Union. As regards our partners outside the Customs Union, we share a customs border with them; accordingly, barriers remain."

Irina Tochitskaya, a candidate of economic sciences

at the Institute of Privatisation and Management, also believes that the CIS free trade zone and the Customs Union have no contradictions. She tells us, "The Customs Union is a higher form of integration. Agreements achieved within it are unchanged. As regards the CIS agreement, firstly, it's important that Russia has signed it. Its earlier signing was postponed as Russia did not wish to launch free trade without

exemptions. Secondly, it's important for Belarus that the whole CIS market opens up, as the country exports its industrial manufactures to these states. The Ukrainian market is of major importance, being our second trading partner after Russia."

In the first half of 2011, CIS turnover rose by 48 percent. Conceptually, the new agreement forms the basis of mutual trade growth. Time will tell.

'Summer garden' in metro

Artistic decoration of Minsk's new metro station to pleasantly surprise Minskites and city guests

The final stop on Minsk's premier metro line — Malinovka — is to open in 2013. At present, deep engineering communications are being laid, alongside service-utilities and storm drainage. Work is being conducted six days a week to keep to schedule. The new station will have two entrance lobbies: one leading to Dzerzhinsky Avenue and the other to Yesenin Street — with elevators and a ramp for wheelchairs, to allow access for those with limited mobility.

"The final decoration of the last stop on the Moskovsky line of Minsk's metro is to be themed in green and crimson," notes Vladimir Telepnev, chief architect of Minskmetroproekt. "The columns on the platforms will be bright green, below a blue ceiling, creating the illusion of a clear sky 'hanging' above a summer garden. Special illuminations will add to the effect."

Learning about others

Five Belarusian universities represented at international China Education Expo 2011 exhibition, held in Beijing

The Belarusian Education Ministry's stand included representatives from the Belarusian State University, the Belarusian State Economic University, Minsk's State Linguistic University, Grodno's State University and the Scientific-Technological Park of the Belarusian National Technical University. It attracted crowds of Chinese and foreign guests who were eager to discover which specialisations are offered in Belarus.

Our Belarusian delegation visited the Chinese Jingjile educational company during its trip, and took part in a press conference organised at the Belarusian Embassy to China, discussing the services offered to international students in Belarus.

Moving up ratings ladder

Belarus rises 22 positions on last year's figures in *Doing Business 2012* report by World Bank and International Finance Corporation

eration reforms conducted from June 2010 to May 2011, with ten indicators used.

Belarus enjoys 9th position in 'Starting a Business', 156th — in 'Paying Taxes', 152nd — in 'Trading Across Borders', 4th — in 'Registering Property', 44th — in 'Dealing

with Construction Permits', 98th — in 'Gaining Credit', 82nd — in 'Resolving Insolvency', 14th — in 'Enforcing Contracts', 79th — in 'Protecting Investors', and 175th — in 'Gaining Electricity'.

The authors note that some conditions of business have improved in

Belarus, with the move up from last position in 'Paying Taxes' being the major success (up from 183rd last year). Pleasingly, Belarus has advanced 27 positions, to 156th place.

Overall, the country has risen 22 places, joining the top twenty states for advancement, and is now

among the top three 'reformers', behind Georgia and Ruanda.

"Belarus has significantly advanced, so we hope that, next year, progress will be even more apparent," stressed one of the *Doing Business 2012* authors, Tea Trumbic, at a Minsk briefing.



The *Doing Business 2012* report includes 183 countries, studying key legislation regulating the business activity for national companies. The rating takes into consid-